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TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

VOL. 48
NO. 4

20 CENTS

MAY SEVENTH 1918

In This Issue

OGDEN - PELLEY
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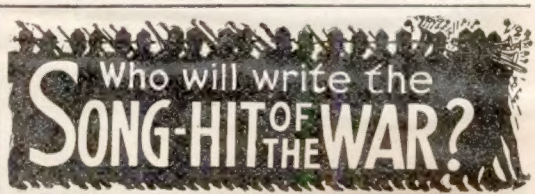

With this country entering its second year in the "World War" it is doubtful if the song which will be known as the "Hit of the War," has as yet made its appearance. While it is true that such War Songs as "Over There" and "Liberty Bell" have made some impression, have Our Boys adopted another "It's a Long Way To Tipperary," which has been the great favorite with the "English Tommies"? Inasmuch as several Commanders of our training cantonments have requested boys in the service to write such a song it appears to be still wanting.

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TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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President

THE AMERICAN TOBACCO COMPANY
NEW YORK

The "Makings" of a Nation

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XLVIII. MAY 7, 1918. No. 4.

The Guard of Timberline

By George Washington Ogden

Author of "The Fighting Sheepman," Etc.

Conservation of the national forests is one of the most vital tasks of the government, for their wood has been ruthlessly taken for the manufacture of paper without proper provision for reforestation. In this novel Mr. Ogden gives us a wonderfully dramatic picture of the primeval woods and their friends and foes at grips. Politics and fire seek to destroy the growth of centuries, while the government rangers seek to stay the vandalism.. It is a stirring narrative that will linger long in the mind.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

WAVERLEY was a place of silver mines. On one side of it, pressing close the mountain, a little river ran. Once this stream had passed its channel as pure and clear as mountain air, but now it flowed a soapy gray, as if ten thousand laundresses emptied their tubs into its veins. This discoloration and pollution came from the chemicals used at the mines for concentrating the ore.

Tailings from these mines rose like buttresses against the mountain from the river's bank just above the limits of the town; the sad waters of the poisoned stream moved away from that desecration of the landscape to fall into a great, broad lake some miles down the rough valley through which the railroad came.

There was but a narrow place at the head of the valley for Waverley to stand. Half a mile across, from mountaintop to mountaintop it was, and there was the greenery of pines to the crests of the ridges, all of them lying below the timber line. It was a rough and bleak place, at the best that could be made of it, with many saloons thrusting bold faces upon the streets. Hospitals alternated with boarding houses, all for the miners in the several great bores which reached down to the hot vitals of the earth a little way up the river, around a shoulder of the mountain, out of sight.

By day, from the time the miners thronged out of it to their work until they came again, grimy and hungry, into its barren halls, Waverley lay like a crocodile on the bank of the outraged river, its vile mouth stretched to swallow any unwary one who might chance its way. Only now and then the clang and rattle of an ambulance brought faces to the doors as the torn and mangled from mine accidents were borne past to the hospitals. Then the interest was not so much in the victims' state

and prospects of recovery as in the speculation upon whether they had left enough to pay their bills.

By night the amethyst street lights were ringed with rosy tints in the mountain mists, and games were spread. Bar furniture glistened under the dampness of trade, harps and violins were profaned to the obscene music of wide-licensed halls. On the outside of life in Waverley there was a certain charm of wild freedom, of picturesqueness, which we have been told no longer is to be found in this many-cornered land. But underneath the light and noise there was the calculativeness of commerce, the coldness of rapacity in its grossest guise. Vice was prince at this poor court of fools.

Dan Cameron, forest ranger, had come down from Timberline to report on matters of gravest importance to his chief, the supervisor. The sun was high as he passed through Waverley that morning, and many a maid and matron on the street turned again to look at him as he marched along, his head up, the wind in his clean, bold face.

Miles away at a brookside he had shaved that morning, for he always carried his kit with him and used it with military regularity, no matter whether he might be within five miles or a hundred miles of the chance of meeting another of his kind. The pack on his shoulders seemed no more than a leaf, the gladness of strong life was in his steady blue eyes.

He had come eighty miles in a straight line over mountains, through wild highland meadows and thick pine forests with the needles and cones a deep, soft-yielding bed beneath his tread. A tinder bed it was in those rainless August days, that blanket of pine leaves cemented by the pitch droppings of centuries from the boughs. Cameron had made many a deflection from the crow flight of his line of march as he pushed forward, to mount a bare knob and sweep the forest with anxious eyes for the dreaded blue of rising smoke.

Timberline was his station on a mountaintop, eighty miles by the truest line a man could walk to the compass from the railroad and Waverley. It was a perch on the table rock that Cameron inhabited from the time, late in May, when he could drive over two pack horses with supplies, until snow warned him away and made the forest safe from fire again. That usually was early in October; but once in a while, by a generous lengthening of the season, the road was open until November.

Between times Cameron saw no face, heard no voice but his own. Campers never penetrated as far as Timberline. Cameron was stationed there not to watch their coming and going, but against the careless fires which they might leave for the wind to spread in that vast treasury of the nation's timbered wealth.

From his barren mountaintop the ranger could scan the reserve for a hundred miles on every hand. It was a vantage point that nature had raised there when it shaped that wild-sweeping park of pine forest and tumbled hills. A man stationed there with a telephone line to headquarters at Waverley could report a fire at its very beginning, and help could be rushed to him to stamp it out before it grew out of man's control.

With a telephone line to Waverley this could have been done. But there was no telephone line between Timberline and Waverley, nor between Timberline and anywhere else in all the world.

The ranger had his high place, his strong eyes, and field glasses to find fires with, but nothing save his legs to carry the news of them out and summon help to smother them. Montgomery, the supervisor of the Bitter Root Reserve, had put Cameron on that watch because it was the most important in his jurisdiction of many thousand square miles. Cameron was a man who could live alone without hating himself, and keep his head sound through months of silent loneliness. Timberline was no place for a garrulous man.

Ever since that forest had been withdrawn, five or six years at the time Cameron came marching down from his

mountain, the supervisor had been laboring with the senators and representatives in Congress from the two States in which the reserve lay, for that slender, inexpensive little thread of wire eighty miles long, which might on some dreaded day save the nation a million dollars for every mile of its length. The result had been only talk and bitterness and disappointment. The senior senator from the State in which the town of Waverley lay had blocked every appropriation, and finally had killed the effort entirely.

This the statesman had done in his chagrin over the withdrawal of the vast forests of pine and cedar from the public domain. No man should have known better than he the peril of the forest from fire, for his home was in Waverley, with the walls of pine rising on the flanking hills. But that forest had been a rich field of exploitation and greedy waste to the lumbermen of the Northwest, with whom the senator's interests were interwoven and entwined. If they were not to be permitted to lick the mountains bare in their own greedy way, then surrender it to fire rather than save it to the needs of another generation. Damn the man who came after him thirty or fifty years and might need a house in Kansas, said the senator in a speech; what he had in his heart was the present prosperity of the man in the hills back home.

Now Cameron had come to tell his chief that the need of a telephone line never was so great, the danger of the forest never so disturbing before. He had come to ask for help so watch could be maintained day and night at Timberline. It was the first time in his experience that he ever had asked for help; it was the first time that he ever had felt the need.

He found the supervisor in his office up a flight of stairs in a drab old building overlooking the river.

"I've been praying for rain with every breath for the last six weeks," said Cameron.

"I guess all of us have here in the Bitter Root—all but Senator Drummond. I expect he'd like to see us singed up a little."

Cameron shook his head. "We don't seem to be organized right up here in this reserve to get results on prayers anywhere, chief."

Montgomery sighed, a shadow of sadness in his face. He sat watching the breaking water among the stones as if he calculated its volume per minute, and how far it would go in extinguishing a forest fire.

"Yes, I'm afraid we're weak somewhere on prayers and petitions," he confessed.

Cameron had been studying the supervisor's face in much the same speculative manner as Montgomery had been watching the river. He turned his head now to look up the slope of the mountain, olive gray in its centuries-old pines, thinking that Jim Montgomery had grown grayer, worrying under that burden of responsibility to the nation for the billions of feet of timber in that great and rich preserve.

Montgomery was a short, thick-shouldered man, with large wise head. A stubble of roan beard was over his face, and from his soiled white shirt and black string necktie, its untidy bow slued to one side, to the crumpled state of his outward clothes, there was a look about him of one who had stood a long vigil under a strain.

Usually there was a laugh in his eyes when a ranger came in, and a light word to break the crust of melancholy that generally clung to a man after a month or more in the dark aisles of the solemn forest. Cameron missed both smile and word, marking in place of them a deeper sadness, amounting almost to hopelessness, he believed. It was too much for one man to carry obscurely and thanklessly, Cameron very well understood.

Never before in the recollection of the oldest settlers had it been so long without rain in the Bitter Root Range. One feared, as he walked through the forest, that every snapping twig under his feet would start the dreaded blaze that, once set and under way, ten thousand men could not stem nor confine.

It was of this contingency that these two men talked—of fire lines, trenches, and the possibility of bringing in help to fight it if the dreaded element should break loose and sweep those pine-choked gorges and green mountainsides. Their voices were low as they discussed these things, as the voices of men who spoke of a thing too fearful to be touched with the ordinary word, and in their faces there was a cloud of solemnity which deepened as they leaned, heads close together, and planned like generals to meet the expected blow of an insidious foe.

"I can't spare two men at Timberline, as much as they're needed," said the supervisor at last, leaning back out of the close conference.

"No, I see you can't," said Cameron.

"I'm going to keep you down here and send Branson to Timberline. You're worth more to me here than he is, and I suppose he'll see a fire if one starts under his nose. You've got to pry that feller out of a book every time you want him."

"Books of desolation and despair," said Cameron. "I know his disease. I've seen his literature."

"I haven't got anything in general against college men—you're a college man, I believe, Cameron?"

"Oh, well, never mind, chief."

"Not in general. But if they make many like Branson, I'd thank the department to keep them back there in the college country. They might try 'em out in Maine."

Cameron got up, flexed his shoulders in the freedom from the weight of his pack like an eagle trying his wings for flight.

"I think I'll go and get a bowl of oysters," he said.

Montgomery put his troubles behind him and smiled. They always wanted oysters when they came in from the long watches in the woods.

"All but Branson," said he, completing the thought aloud. Cameron understood.

"He's too much of an oyster himself to eat another, chief."

"He's troubled with indigestion of the soul, son. There's many a man like him needin' a dose of the cayenne pepper of genuine trouble to wake 'em up. He thinks he's livin' in a soarin', exclusive kind of a fashion very satisfactory to himself."

"He'll get to hating himself if he stays at Timberline long enough."

"Then maybe he'll turn to likin' somebody else," said the supervisor, allowing himself the indulgence of another grin.

Cameron took up his hat. "Will you join me, chief?"

"No, thank you, son; no oysters for me this day."

So Cameron went alone, filled with the pleasant anticipation of his feast, a commonplace thought to fill the mind of one so lately setting all its defensive points to meet the exigencies of a situation involving the safety of not only millions, but billions of dollars' worth of national property. Especially commonplace when it is understood that he was marching to meet cove oysters, those tough little fellows cooked in the can when packed, floating in milky water the color of the river that went boisterously its debauched way among the stones.

CHAPTER II.

Back in the office of the supervisor, satisfied of oysters, Cameron found Montgomery reading the one book that he ever had seen him read in all the years that he had known him. This was the poems of Robert Burns. The book would slip conveniently into the coat pocket, where it rode on all the journeys that Jim Montgomery made over his kingdom of pines.

It was a vent for him for all his moods, a palliative for any distress. When other men would have cursed and snarled, Montgomery read Burns until the storm settled in his soul. Between naps in railroad coaches, after nights and days with only patches of sleep like that here and there, he would sit up, red-eyed, and read until his troubles grew small against the poet's gray skies and stormy winter nights.

The supervisor put down his book as

Cameron stood in the door, and nodded the ranger in.

"I forgot to tell you that Branson is off for a few days, Dan. I let him go with a party Senator Drummond's girl took up Big Creek somewhere to camp. It's a kind of a social blow-out she's givin' some folks from the East. She seems a bit soft on Branson. Losh, mon! I wish she'd marry him and take him off my hands."

Montgomery's humor came back to him with the wish, and stirred in him with deep chucklings, making him red of the face like a nip of hot liquor.

"Oh, *she's* here, is she?"

"She is that, and a look in her eye that takes a young man's breath. Poor lad, up on your rock at Timberline you miss half of your life, I know. It comes to you part bright, part blank, like a revolving stage with the lights half out. It's a hard life for us all!"

"I've not got any grouch against it, chief. If they'll just string it out long enough for me—that's all."

"Sure, lad; that's the spirit to look at it in. Now, you go on your ways to Big Creek and take Branson by the ear and send him down to me. I give you furlough to stop up there and keep your eye open for sparks till the party comes back. Branson's had the summer here among the girls—it's only a just distribution of labor to give you a turn at it now."

A hurried step struck the stairs and came storming up as if somebody arrived to report the fire so long looked for in trepidation by the two men in the room. With the first sound of it Montgomery pushed his chair back from the desk and squared about to face the door. A cloud of sternness came like a gray wind over him as he clenched his big fists and rested them like hammers on his thighs.

The door stood open. Cameron saw the hasty visitor as he reached the landing and rounded into the little hall. He was a small, dry man, very thin of legs, very yellow of face. He carried his hat in his hand, not out of respect, as was plain when he entered the door, when he immediately put it on. His prominent black eyes glistened as if he had a fever as he stopped just within the door and shook a crumpled letter at Montgomery, unable for the passion that he was in to say anything with the first breath.

"I've just heard from Washington," the visitor said, his voice unsteady. "I've been turned down! You're the man that's responsible for it!"

"I hope so," said Montgomery, quite calm in his outward show.

"'On the report of the supervisor,' says the goggle-eyed sneak the president's put at the head of the department, 'your bid on timber in the Spicer Creek section of the Bitter Root Reserve has been reconsidered, and the contract is hereby withdrawn.' You've cost me three hundred thousand dollars by your damned meddlin', Montgomery!"

"I'm very glad to hear it, Mr. Silverstone," the supervisor said, the light in his gray eyes, and the smile on his tight, grim mouth bearing out his declaration like the support of a shout.

"Well, I've come up to tell you that no man can double cross me like that and get away with it. I give it to you now that I'm out to get you, and I'll land your skin if it's the last thing I ever put through!"

"Maybe you will," said Montgomery, his face growing gray again with that shadow of grimness, "but let me correct you in your way of speaking of this matter. A man can't double cross another unless he's been in a deal with him, according to my understanding of the term. Consider that when you go talkin' around this town, if you'll be so kind."

"I don't suppose I offered you enough. I'll bet if I'd 'a' made my bid ten thousand you'd 'a' sent a different kind of a report!"

"Is that all you've got in you?" Montgomery asked, hands on the arms of his chair as if to rise.

"I suppose you'd revise it if I'd show you enough money!"

"If it is"—Montgomery stood, ignoring the last taunt—"you'll drop lighter for bein' empty."

With the words he caught the visitor by the collar, spun him round as if he had no more weight to him than a sack

of chaff, kicked him soundly, and flung him to the head of the stairs. Before the one called Silverstone could turn in defense, even if he had it in mind to do so, the supervisor was upon him with another drive of the foot that sent him tumbling to the street door.

Montgomery returned to his desk and sat down with a great sigh.

"Now I've got *that* off my mind at last!" he said.

"Old Lije Silverstone!" said Cameron, somewhat astonished by the supervisor's rapid and precise action.

"The slanderous thief!"

"I've heard that he stole twenty million feet of lumber out of these forests before they were withdrawn. He ought to be satisfied."

"He did; pillaged with free hand. The mark of his thievery is on a hundred hills; it will take three hundred years to restore the forest as it was before he swept through it like a fire, sparin' nothing. He offered the government about one-eighth of what that timber on Spicer Creek is worth, and I nailed his tail to a stump."

"I'm glad you landed on him that way, chief. It warmed my gizzard to see your work."

"It comforted me to punt him, too, lad. I've had it on my conscience to do it ever since he began offerin' me bits o' bribe money through his hangdog agents, two years and more ago. Well, you'll be headin' for Big Creek this afternoon?"

"I'm off," said Cameron, swinging his pack to his shoulders.

The ranger marched on in the beautiful sunlight that clothed Waverley like a mantle of absolution, his chin high, the light of his honest life in his quick blue eyes. He passed through the main street of the town, sniffing ether from hospital windows, and turned into the place of the elect called the Park.

The Park was a thumb on the valley holding Waverley in its palm, a snug little harbor between the mountains, which rose there rugged and steep and swathed in pines just back of the houses. There the mine superintendents, mine owners, mine engineers, well-conditioned merchants, and the doctors lived. There also Senator Drummond had his home, which he occupied when not in Washington. Downtown in the hotel block was the bank of which he was the president.

The senator's house stood at the apex of this little indentation, a pretentious wooden structure of garbled architecture, of protuberant windows, curved porches, unsightly gable ends. Cameron had passed it many times, but never before had it held quite as much interest for him as now.

For Joan Drummond had come back to her mountain home after many years. He had heard talk of her and her alluring charms, chiefly through the Waverley paper, which kept a handsome two-column half tone of her ready for use on the slightest excuse. That picture had become as familiar to him as the face of a friend. Her social triumphs in the East were largely recorded in the paper, although few in Waverley remembered her. If she gave a theater party in Washington, which she did frequently, of course, the echo of it sounded a great deal louder in Waverley than the original in the capital.

Away back in the days when Jefferson Drummond had been a sawmill man, a sort of lumber princeling in his locality, Joan had lived in Waverley and had gone to school there with her dress a little below her knees. Those who remembered her thought of her as a little girl, with wholesome face, with slender calves, with nimble feet tearing harum-scarum through the streets of the little town, braids of hair streaming out behind her, voice as loud as the strongest in the school-yard games.

Cameron had no such recollection of her, for he had come to Waverley long after political honors had advanced the social standing of the Drummond family; nor any recollection of her at all, save that based on the excellent half-tone engraving in the Waverley paper. He knew that a great deal could be put into or taken out of a photographed face. He had seen a clear, beautiful face in the paper. But it would have

been impossible to estimate from it how much or how little she possessed of soul.

Soul was not a parental attribute in any such quantity that it was likely to become a hereditary trait. Senator Drummond was reputed to be so poor in that respect, indeed, that he must have left his children impoverished if he had had many of them. There was a son somewhere, Cameron had heard, and there was this girl Joan. Maybe the mother of them had the soul to go with the old man's unflavored strength.

At any event, Cameron was not quickened by the thought of meeting the senator's daughter. He smiled when he remembered what Montgomery had said about her being soft on Branson. It did not recommend her favorably to his anticipation. Some woman would have to take Branson out of the world's market some day, according to the rule of a jennet for every jack. That it would be possible to respect such a woman, with a distant, cold, abstract sense of duty, Cameron admitted; but that he ever could come to admire her was a thing beyond his conception, quite.

"That boy ought to have a solid year of Timberline, summer and winter, to take some of the conceit out of him," Cameron told himself, as he struck into the woods to set a line for Big Creek. "That'd teach him quicker than anything I know of that he's only six-feet-something against one of those old pine tree's two hundred. A man feels mighty small out there sometimes when dark's coming on and he begins to sense how much longer it takes to make a tree like one of these than it does to finish the biggest man that ever was designed. Taking him up and down, a man's longer in the making, and amounts to less, than anything that grows."

This of man in general, of course, with a thought bearing on Branson in particular.

CHAPTER III.

Branson had won a scholarship somewhere or another by an essay on Russian literature. No matter what university or college it was, or where, it was a long way from the mid-continental city in which he was laboring at the time of his spirit-groaning way as a reporter on a daily paper.

By nature Branson was a gall-tainted, saturnine fellow, too much of a salamander to get along at journalism, where a little warm blood is necessary, no matter for the belief to the contrary in the public conceit. A youth he was at that time, with a solemn, rabbity face, long legs like a newborn colt, long arms dangling great hands almost to his knees. He believed that the Almighty had used a special celestial clay in patterning him, and went about sniffing in his cold-nosed way, a book in his pocket.

Turgenieff, Gorky, Tolstoy, in translation, he bore about with him always, and rammed his large bony nose into them, feet high on something, if anything at all was available, while waiting the conclusion of executive sessions or the passing of the dogwatch at central police station, to which he was regularly assigned. He held no communication with ordinary reporters, only lifting blank eyes in insolent rebuke when one not aware of his superior position in creation chanced to venture a salutation.

The men of his profession disliked him; nobody rejoiced with him when he won the scholarship and went away with his Russian friends sagging his pockets. But nearly everybody felt sorry for the college that had taken such a blind chance.

The place where he had lived and labored out his quasi-philosophical views of life and current news for the very provincial paper that had employed him, closed after him like water out of which a hand is drawn. Only a few of them on the provincial paper puzzled after him and looked from time to time toward the east for an especial illumination of the sky. For in that office there were some who believed his salamander coldness to be a token of vast, uninterpreted power.

A man can create this impression if he will gloom around with his mouth shut, and he can travel a long time and distance on his reputation. If he believes in himself, as Branson believed, he will find a great number of people

in the world who feel themselves honored to hold his hat. Especially if there is family influence and money back of him, as there was behind Branson.

There is no knowing what relation there was between Branson's dark heart and trees, but sympathy or attraction of some kind there must have been, or a far-calculating commercial design. In the college to which his Russian essay carried him he elected the study of forestry. From there he went, in time, to the service of the government, which brought him where we find him—to the Bitter Root country, where there are men with hair on their shins, and blood in their hearts as strong as the sap of a thousand pines.

He was still carrying his Russians with him, and their philosophy, steeped and mingled in the hollows of his cold mind, had killed the youth in him and clouded his soul. All life to him was dissent and disapproval, gruffness and gloom. He hated himself when he bent to custom and shook hands with another man.

He came as a forest ranger to the Bitter Root country, and worked out of Waverley under Jim Montgomery, a man among men, with no philosophy in him whatever save the philosophy of being square.

Age had improved Branson somewhat in the point of appearance, setting him more solidly, broadening him in the shoulders and filling out his muscles, for which he had carried the bonework all along. If he had but permitted himself the humanizing luxury of a smile once in a while where it could have been seen by his fellow men, he might very well have passed along for a pretty good specimen of his kind.

Cameron had attempted to make friends with Branson at the beginning of the gloomy young man's career as a forest ranger, and had been rebuffed for his kindness. In his belief in his own sufficiency, Branson persisted in the isolated ways which he had mapped out when he began to absorb Russian ideas. None of the rangers liked him, and the supervisor lived in the hope that some sharp turn in Branson's prospects would take him speedily and forever out of the Bitter Root Reserve.

So, considering all, there was much material for speculation for Cameron in what the supervisor had said about Joan Drummond being soft on the big cub. He knew that Branson's heavy air of austerity, his somber silence, his gloomy brow, would have the attraction of something not understood for a great many women.

It might be, therefore, that Joan Drummond was trying to lift the boarskin that Branson was masquerading in, and sound what appeared to her a romance and a mystery. A woman could not see through it like a man; she would have to reach her final enlightenment by the road of painful or humiliating or even shameful experience. Cameron hoped that Joan Drummond was no more deserving than her father, if it was designed that she must come under the influence of that cur in a boar's hide, Edgar Branson, dark disciple of the philosophy of despair.

Cameron camped that night near the cabin of a settler who was holding a timber claim on which he had filed before the withdrawal of the forest. There were hundreds of settlers of this character scattered through the mountains, upon whom one came with startling suddenness out of the nothingness of blank forests, each with the hope in his heart that a railroad would come in soon and make his timber marketable, and nearly every one of them with a hard grudge against the government for withdrawing the forest from despoilation, thus stopping what the wasters of the Northwest spoke of as "the improvements of the country."

Old Rodney Haines, at whose place Cameron camped, was no exception to this general run of them. He was a harsh old man of few words, with upper lip shaved clean, like a Dunkard's, flaring red-gray beard cut straight across as if he had laid it over a log and barbered it with an ax. He lived alone in his miserable hut among the dark pines, and the shadows of the forest had settled in his heart.

Cameron recalled that when he had

passed up that way in the middle of May on his journey to Timberline, he had taken a picture of the old man's place. There was four feet of snow on the ground around Haines' cabin then, and it lay deep on the roof where the storms of winter had trampled it. Now it was so dry around there that Cameron winced every time his heel struck a stone, fearing that he would start a fire.

Haines came to his door in surly humor when Cameron stopped in the early morning to inquire for the campers. They were ten or twelve miles up the creek, the old man said, and if that was all that he wanted to disturb a man at his breakfast for, he'd better pass on.

Not all, Cameron said. He wanted to caution him against fire and to deputize him, under the supervisor's orders, to act as guard in his neighborhood to see that campers and fishermen observed the forestry regulations in the same regard.

The old man flared up at that, and refused to serve.

"Let it burn and be damned!" he said. "If I saw a fire I wouldn't bend my back to dip a bucket of water out of the crick to throw on it—I'd let it go——"

"It'd clean you out along with everything else, you old fool! That's no way for a man to talk."

"Let it clean me out, then. If it does, I'll be shut of this cursed place and this crackbrained life in this dungeon of woods. If it hadn't been for a crowd of fellers like you that ought to be wearin' skirts, cryin' around about the waste and the robbery of the comin' ginerations, we'd 'a' had lumberin' roads up here, and sawmills, and we'd 'a' sold our timber off and skedaddled out with the money long ago."

"Yes, you would—not! Do you suppose the lumber pirates like Silverstone would 'a' bought your timber when they could have stolen all they wanted all around you? Well, you've got another guess coming to you."

"They'd 'a' bought me out," the old man insisted hotly, "for I've got the best timber on Big Crick. Some of this'll scale fifty thousand board feet to the acre."

"Yes, it's a good piece of timber, Haines. That much more reason why you ought to protect it. If you'll hold on to it they'll have to come to you in time. The bars are up against their thievery now."

"They won't build no narry gauge up here just to lumber my timber, and the Widder Norberg's, and Ned Swanson's up at Three Meadows. But if you women in britches'd 'a' kep' your noses out of our business here in this Northwestern country they'd 'a' been rippin' the guts out of these woods before today."

"You're right, they would. And you'd 'a' been gettin' about as much out of it as your old cow could suck out of that stump."

"Well, it can burn if it wants to; I'll never wet a sack to flop it out. And you can tell them women in britches back there in Washington what I said!"

Haines shut the door. Cameron went on his way, thinking what a different tune the old man would have to fiddle if fire ever did get loose in those woods. He'd be about the first one to come whooping to Montgomery for help to save his claim.

He took into account the life the old man had been living there for seven or eight years in the "dungeon of woods," as he had called it. Not unjustly, for the gloom of a dungeon was in its isolation, for all the glad beams of sun which focused through the trees with their hot intensity those summer days. Noble for the purpose for which they were designed, but a tomb of greenery for one incapable of contemplation beyond their gray boles and storm-rocked tops.

Pine forests more magnificent never stood than clothed the western slope of the Bitter Root Range that day. Two hundred feet was no uncommon height, with diameter of three to four feet, as straight as masts, a hundred feet without a limb. Thousands of square miles of this unbroken forest swept up and down the mountains and stood waiting

the fulfillment of its time and purpose in the valleys where noisy streams flashed in and out through the shadow and sun.

It had taken ten thousand years to make that forest, to build and mature, to level and decay and heap the mold that nourished these vast columns of living wood. Centuries had come and gone over the gray mountains since many of those mighty cedars in the vales and stout pines on the steep slopes had put forth their first tiny plumes of green. Man was of the ephemera, indeed, under the shadow of their long, patient lives.

They stood so thick for miles together in places that a man could not turn between them with outstretched arms. Looking down from the mountaintops which reached above the timber line and stood bare, this forest seemed a more marvelous creation, even more solemnly majestic, than the sea.

Cameron had been three hours and more afoot, pushing his way up the creek, when the sound of an accordion brought him to a stand. The musician was so close at hand that Cameron wondered why the sound of his approach had not startled the player from his covert like a hare. The musician was hidden behind some thick shrubs at the streamside, but the sound of his melody rose higher than the pines. Now his voice took up the air. At the first word of the song Cameron smiled. It was the voice of Nimrod Smith, logging-camp cook, infamous for his sour biscuits for four hundred miles:

"O sweet Evelyna, O *dear* Evelyna,
The pride of the valley,
The *girl* that I lo-uh-ve!
O *sweet* Evelyna, O *dear* Evelyna,
My lo-uh-ve for you shall never, never die-ah,
My lo-uh-ve for you-oo shall ne-*ev*-er die!"

That was the song that Nimrod was singing, and that was his manner of singing it, just those few verses in variation of accented words, and no more. If there was any beginning or ending to the song, Nimrod must not have known it. He snatched that much out of the middle of it, chorus maybe, and went carrying it off on his sheep bleat of a tenor with melting tremolo.

Cameron listened until the novelty was gone out of it—which passed, indeed, with about the twelfth repetition—then tossed a pine cone over the bushes. The song snapped, the accordion's voice died with a note half finished, like the squawk of a fowl with its neck under the ax. There was such a silence behind the bushes as a man might fall into when caught in some frivolous diversion unexpected of his dignity.

Cameron let him sweat and suffer in his uncertainty a little while, then stepped from his concealment and hailed the camp cook with a hearty word. Nimrod was sitting on a rock close by the waterside, looking as foolish as a six-foot man ever looked when caught in the caroling of a love song that nobody ever suspected he could sing. He was straining forward in tense rigidity, as if on the point of sneaking off into the brush. He blushed, laughed a little foolishly, but altogether in relief when he saw who had caught him.

"Dang you, I thought it was somebody from the camp!" he said, getting up with a grin, holding out his hand.

Nimrod was not much more than a shadow with a coat on. His thinness made him appear taller than he was, the homely melancholy of his face more serious than the deepest intention that ever ripened in his head. His face was very long, and peculiarly shaped, like a pear, the large end downward. Smith had a great amount of light hair, soaped down and parted painfully; a large red mustache which drooped as damply and despairingly as if he had stood all his life out in the rain.

"I didn't know you could play the accordion, Nim."

"I'm only just a-learnin'. A feller's got to take up something when he's lonesome."

"Surely you're not still pining after that Birdie Swanson!" Cameron put a weight of surprise and incredulity into his words, as if such constancy was a thing beyond the belief of man.

"I'm as holler as a fiddle longin' for that girl, Dan."

"There are others—let her go if she won't have you. Say, I saw a peacherino yesterday down at Waverley—the new cashier in the Gray Goose."

"I ain't got no eyes for no other woman, Dan. If she keeps on her slightin' me, I'll jump off of the bridge. I told her I'd jump off of the bridge the last time I saw her, and I'll do it, too."

"What bridge?" Cameron inquired, eying the cook with a sidelong glance of humor.

"Down at Waverley."

Cameron grinned. The bridge at Waverley was not more than eleven feet above the water. He did not feel that it was high enough to move the concern of an indifferent lady with a threat like that.

"You pick out one of the bridges between Waverley and the big tunnel, Nim, and you'll be more likely to fetch her," he suggested; "a high one, the highest one you can find."

"I wouldn't jump off of one of them bridges for no woman that ever lived!" Nimrod declared. "But it ain't no joke to me; I don't care how it looks to other folks."

"Of course not. You've been in love so often the joke's worn out of it, Nim. It isn't any funnier to you than being married."

"Aw, you git out!" Smith was pleased; he felt that a compliment to his long and unending campaign of love had been paid. He grinned. "Well, how're you makin' it this summer, Dan?"

"Pretty fair, Nim. You've got a bunch of folks up here somewhere that I'm looking for."

"Yes; I'm sloppin' a drove of dudes and darlin's about a mile on up the crick."

"Branson's cuttin' up as gay as a colt, I suppose?"

Nimrod turned a look of knowing comicality on his companion. "Yes, he's as lively as a plate of cold pancakes. But I tell you he did throw a surprise last night."

"He did? What was it?"

"Well, sir, I saw that feller settin' by the fire like an ordinary low-down man that don't wear leather leggin's, talkin' to a girl! Say, I thought I'd faint and fall back in it!"

"It must have been a shock. But how do you suppose the poor girl felt?"

"She was lookin' up to him like he was the picture of a saint at the head of her bed. And it was Joan, too. I thought Joan'd grow up to have more sense than to take up with a feller like him, but you can't tell about them women. Sometimes they——"

Cameron stretched out his arm suddenly with a gesture that shut the words up in the loquacious philosopher's mouth.

"Who's that man up there on the ridge? Does he belong to your outfit?"

"No, he don't. But seems to me I know that feller's build. If he'd turn around a little so's I——"

"Whist! Somebody's coming."

Cameron drew the cook behind the bole of a big pine, where they stood partly shielded from sight of the man in the clear, rocky spot a little way up the side of the ridge. Branson broke from the brush just beyond the stranger, throwing cautious glances about him as if he came to keep a guilty tryst.

"Oh, it's somebody Branson knows—it's all right. I'm leery of every stranger I see in the woods this weather."

"He's brought Branson's mail up to him," said Nimrod. "What do you think of that for airs? Special messenger to fetch him his letters up here to camp! Well, I'll bet you two bits there's another girl back of the corncrib, as the Dutchman said."

"Maybe there is, Nim, but we've got no business spying on his secrets, have we? We can keep it to ourselves. Come on!"

Cameron started forward with considerable unnecessary noise. At the first crackle of the branches Branson leaped to cover, and his messenger sprang after him, both of them scudding away like startled deer. Cameron

stopped, a flicker of surprise and displeasure in his face.

"Now, what do you think of that?" said Nimrod.

"I don't see any call for them to be so flighty about it."

"I know that feller—I got a look at him when he turned around. It's Dell Lucas, a cruiser that works for Lije Silverstone. I was goin' to put a knife in that feller one time down on the St. Jo. Him and me——"

"Works for Silverstone, does he?" Cameron's thoughts went leaping after the two men at the mention of that name, his eyes on the waving brushwood where they had disappeared.

"Yes, and he's as crooked as a horseshoe. That feller's so durn crooked he couldn't sleep on the side of a hill."

"Oh, well, I guess it's all right. Branson must have arranged with him to bring up his mail."

"Why in the nations didn't he take it to camp, then, 'stead of meetin' him down here?"

"Maybe he didn't want to give the lady any cause for jealousy, Nim. You ought to know more about such matters than I—you're an old hand."

"Well, a man does have to handle 'em careful," said Nim, sighing as he picked up his accordion and put it in a gunny sack.

But Cameron wondered, as they went on to camp, what connection there could be between Silverstone's loss of the expected timber contract and the visit of this furtive messenger to Branson in the woods. Honest men had no reason for hiding their meetings, nor dishonest ones, for that matter, as long as they met for a purpose that was not ashamed of the day.

CHAPTER IV.

The camp was in one of those little level glades which one bursts upon suddenly and gratefully at times in a mountain country. There are places in mid-forest which have about them a peculiar freeness from cluttering undergrowth, where grasses thrive and moss grows deep and cool at the tree roots; places which seem to tell of old occupation by man, although no trace nor memory of his handiwork remains. One feels a mystic comradeship in such spots; there comes the sense of isolation without loneliness, security without preparation.

In such a spot Joan Drummond had pitched her camp. There were several tents, sheltering a dozen or more young people, with Mrs. Drummond as duenna of the enterprise. She came forward in her protective capacity to challenge Cameron when he arrived in company of Nimrod Smith.

Mrs. Drummond was an indistinct little woman who appeared to need nothing so much as a good rest. Her eyes were weary, as of the light, her hair was tossed in gray perplexity over her fair forehead, the one feature of her that presented any aspect of calmness or repose. She was relieved to learn that Cameron was only a forest ranger, a man on an errand of peace. Her air of hesitant trepidation at first might have been grounded in the belief that he was a mountain bandit, come to carry off the young doves in her keeping.

Contrasted to the appearance of the young men of the party in their tailored outing garments, their colored hatbands, their tasty leather accouterments, and even Branson, in his leather puttees and riding breeches, Cameron was a rough-and-ready subject to behold. Burs clung to his unsightly socks, which were pulled halfway to his knees over the legs of his corduroys, and burs were thick on his legs. His flannel shirt was good enough for flannel-shirt company, and clean enough, too; but to the eyes of Mrs. Drummond and the fair ones who came out of their tents wonderingly he appeared a coarse, wild fellow whom it would be dangerous to meet after dark.

Several young men with large pipes were jointing fishing rods, Branson among them, with a look of almost human tolerance in his face. Cameron called him aside and delivered Montgomery's order for him to report at headquarters without delay. Branson heard it in surly silence, and turned at

once again to his fishing preparations. The young men with the pipes crowded around Nimrod Smith, inquiring curiously what he had in his sack.

"Ice," said Nimrod, shifting the sack from his shoulder, resting it between his feet out of reach of their investigating fingers.

"Ice? Aw, you get out! The sack's not even wet."

"It's summer ice; it only melts in the wintertime," Nimrod told them.

"Where'd you get it?"

"In a ice cave about three mile down the crick."

"Oh, you'll make us some iced tea, won't you, Nim?" a young woman inquired eagerly.

"I'm sorry, mom"—and Nim looked it in every joint of his long body—"but I got this ice to put under my piller nights to keep me from gittin' the botts."

"Botts! What's botts?" a credulous young man inquired, ignoring the cold look of warning that Branson gave him.

"It's a kind of a ant that crawls in your ears and carries off your brains," said Nimrod. He shouldered his sack and went to his tent.

Winks and grins and a laying together of colored hatbands followed the laugh over the joke that Nimrod made on the mystery of his sack. Cameron feared for the cook's secret as he marched on up the creek. Unless he buried or burned the accordion, one of those colored hatbands would have it out of the bag before night.

Half a mile or so above the camp Cameron hung his pack of blankets and grub on a tree and went to work setting himself up a shelter of pine boughs against the sun, with a hope deep in him that it might also be called upon to turn rain. There evening found him, a doughcake cooking in his little pan tilted toward the coals.

It was dark among the pines when he had finished his comfortable pipe, a wind roaming through them with the sound of a distant waterfall. But there was not such lonely sorrow in that forest threnody to-night as had pierced him at times in his watch at Timberline.

At times there his heart had stood out from his body, it seemed to him, like a ship bending to the wind dim on the horizon, reaching out of that wilderness to find the chord that would ease its melancholy pang. Duty is one thing in a man's life, and the want of love is another. Sometimes both are hard, and always harder in combination. Youth without love is a field lying fallow in the sun.

There was laughter down the little valley to-night, filling the world, and a song rising now and then, dying smothered in gales of laughter, a delicious death. There was a little pang, a little twinge, a little pain as for some indefinable sweet thing not yet a quantity in his life. The ranger rose in restlessness, and stood straining to listen, like a lone buck that hears the distant call of his herd.

Why had Montgomery sent him there on such a foolish duty, warder over a pack of frivolous young people whose most serious business seemed to be the blowing of life away in laughter, like cottonwood seeds on the wind? This in pettishness, in fettered impatience. Then he paused again in his long striding up and down like a young lion just becoming conscious of his strength, and strained to hear what it was they sang.

Duty? There was no duty involved. Montgomery had given him furlough, he recalled it now. The generous fellow had thought to give him a treat, sending him up there to make one of that merry party in their holiday, far from the regulated order of their lives, among the pines.

He thought of an excuse for going down to the camp. None presented. The recollection of the colored hatbands brought a smile. He did not know how well he could mix with colored hatbands now. Even in college he never had worn one, although he had been guilty of a little yellow cap about as big as half a turnip, and a banjo with a bow of the Colors—ah, the Colors! —still radiant in his reverential memory.

There was the fire caution, certainly; they must be warned to leave no spark

alive when they went to bed. He would go down and tell them, and deputize Nimrod Smith to see that the warning was fully observed. He had gone halfway before he thought of his revolver and cartridge belt. He should have left them in camp. One did not go lugging arms on a social visit, even in that part of the world. He stopped, hand on buckle, considering leaving it on a wayside bush until he came back. But it didn't matter; it was a business visit, after all.

The night was falling cool, with a flavor of frost, and fire was comfortable. The campers had built a big one, and were sitting back from it in a wide circle. Cameron's surprise to see Branson sitting among the others overcame every thought of reluctancy to introduce himself into the light. He walked swiftly round to the place where Branson sat, a little apart from the others, a young woman by his side.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Branson," said Cameron, hand to hat, coming to a stand five feet away as stiffly as a color sergeant. "Didn't you understand the orders I brought you?"

Branson got up, with a word of apology to his companion. Cameron knew her at the first meeting of their eyes. Only there was more in her face than the finest engraving ever could express, he thought, refreshed by her beauty as by a word from the wayside that made his heart leap with gladness.

"Come over here," said Branson, striding away from the fire with all the cold dignity of which he was master. Cameron followed, his anger burning in his eyes.

"What are you doing here?" Cameron demanded. "Didn't you understand that Montgomery wanted you to start at once?"

"I'm not under orders from you, Cameron."

"Certainly not; but I'm responsible for your actions to Montgomery. If you're not going, say so, and I'll go back and tell him."

"I take it as a piece of damned impertinence, Cameron, the way you broke in on me a minute ago!"

"I don't care how you take it, Branson."

"When I see fit to go, I'll start. You've insulted me. If you ever open your mouth to me again I'll thrash you within an inch of your life!"

"If it's an insult to remind you of your duty, then I'll insult you again in about ten minutes if you're not on your way to Waverley by then," Cameron replied, in voice so calm and steady that it was more impressive by far than Branson's heated threat.

Branson turned from him, stalked back to the fire in his melodramatic way. Joan Drummond was calling her guests around her, Branson's absence from her side apparently no crippling loss.

"It's dark enough, boys, to get out the torches and things," she said.

There ensued great activity on the part of the colored hatbands, much running and shouting and fetching things from the tents. Sheets, Cameron took the white bundles to be, and drew near, his tiff with Branson cooling out of him in the way of a great and generous nature. At once he was interested in knowing what there was afoot.

"Where's the high priest?" Joan inquired, turning from handing out the sheets to the guests. Branson was beside her at the word, bowing like a duke. "Oh, here you are. Here's your costume; but you'll have to get some flour from Nim for your face, to give you a holy, ascetic paleness that you haven't got."

Mrs. Drummond, in her capacity of chaperon, was seated judiciously in a wicker rocking-chair, a shawl about her shoulders against the chill of the night. When Cameron saw that the celebration or mock rite or whatever it was to be included the bearing of pine-knot torches, he went to her to lodge a cautionary word.

Fair-haired Joan gave him a casual, disinterested look as he passed. The firelight was on her face, half bright, half shadow, like a portrait of a lady at a window from some master of contrast in light and shade. In the quick, full glance that he took of her, the pro-

file was molded like a medallion in his memory. He felt that he never should recall her save in that pose, like Echo at the brookside, her eager youth in her face, her lips apart, her soft, wild-flying hair a nimbus over her shapely little head.

Mrs. Drummond looked up at him, a smile on her dim, tired face, no longer afraid of him, seeing that he walked like a man.

"The children are going to have a torchlight procession among the trees in imitation of some pagan celebration," she said. "You ought to be in it—get Mr. Branson to introduce you around."

"I'm sorry, madam——"

But she interposed with a little laugh, the reflection of youth's exuberance in her eyes.

"Joan, here's another priest for your parade, a real savage," she called. "Give him a shroud and a torch, can't you?"

"Oh, a savage! We'll initiate him!" said a girl's eager, happy voice.

Others took up the cry: "A savage, a savage!" They came crowding round Cameron, the light of their torches dancing in his eyes.

"We're Druids," a pretty girl nodded seriously, holding her torch high, looking curiously into his face, her eyes growing as in wonder as she gazed.

"We're going to sacrifice on an altar down in the pines; Mr. Branson is the high priest," another told him.

"I'm afraid it might turn out a bigger sacrifice than any of you are aware," he told her gravely. Then to Mrs. Drummond: "Madam, I'm sincerely sorry to interfere in the fun, but it would be a very dangerous thing to carry those torches out into the woods. There hasn't been a drop of rain in these mountains for more than six weeks. A coal from one of those torches would set off the forests like powder."

"Oh, the savage wants to spoil our ceremony!" pouted the girl who had looked into his eyes.

"The savage is deeply regretful. Couldn't you pull it off here around the fire in this open space?"

They were loud and unanimous in the opinion that such a thing was impossible; the colored hatbands scoffed him in derisive and mocking words; they demanded by what authority he interfered. No greater authority than that of the United States government, and no less, he told them, with gentle allowance for their indignation. At which the masculine chorus set up a clamor of "yah-h" and "wa-ah" in that insulting, goading, derisive inflection of vulgarity in which no human tribe on earth has such complete proficiency as the American youth.

"Mr. Branson is in the forestry service as well as you," said Joan, "and he doesn't see any danger in it."

"Mr. Branson hasn't been in the forest out here as long as I have. He's never been through a forest fire, Miss Drummond. The supervisor sent me up here under special instructions to watch your fires and see that they didn't get away from you. I'm sorry, but I can't permit you to carry those torches out into the timber. For your own safety I forbid it, as well as the safety of the forest."

"Forbid!" she mocked, turning from him in high contempt. "You can't forbid anything!"

"I'll be responsible to the government for the safety of the forest here to-night, Cameron," said Branson.

Cameron swung to face him, his hand stayed in a motion like a flash halfway to his revolver. There was something in his movement like an explosion. The circle widened around the two men like a drop of oil on water.

"You're not responsible for yourself, you insubordinate hound!" said Cameron.

Branson leaned toward him, his voice between his teeth.

"I'll not brawl with you here, Cameron," he said, "but I'll make you eat your words the first time we meet!"

He looked big enough and dark-minded enough to do worse. There was no doubt of either his courage or sincerity in the matter at all. Branson had a fight in him, and it would take a man to stand up to him when he let

loose the pent humors of his corrosive soul.

"You can settle your differences away from here somewhere," Joan interposed, coming forward, laying a soothing hand on Branson's arm. "I'll not have any fighting or quarreling in this camp." She turned to Cameron. "You'd better go on away from here if it hurts you to see your orders disobeyed, for we're going to have our party."

Branson drew her placating hand through the crook of his arm in a stately, blunt way that suited his studied bearing of mystery very well, and marched her away to where Mrs. Drummond stood. The old lady was excited, and full of despairing exclamations, which calmed before Branson's low-spoken assurance.

Cameron stood considering the situation. It was plain that there was trouble ahead, for he intended to prevent the scattering of fire in that pitch-primed forest if he had to put the whole party under arrest, Branson in the lot. They were talking and laughing again, a new note of excitement in the babel, a sort of intoxication of defiance.

"Mr. Branson says there's absolutely no danger, mother," he heard Joan say. "He knows more about it than that savage, and he's got more authority, too."

"Well, be careful; *do* be careful, Joan!"

Cameron began to think that he probably had blundered in his way of going about it. With Branson upholding them, they could make out a pretty good case against him, even to the extent of showing that he had attempted to be oppressive in his authority. He was debating whether he would better subside and allow them to go on their dangerous prank or hit Branson at the butt of the ear—as he had it hot in his heart now to do—and put the whole crowd under arrest, pack them up, and march them out of the woods that night.

This uncertain state of mind was hoisting and lowering his determination like a ball in a fountain, when somebody ran in front of him, a rush of feet sounded behind him, and the next moment he found himself wound in a rope like a fly in a web. The young men had him prisoner, with great exultation over their adroit coup, his arms at his sides like a mummy, a dozen turns of rope around them to hold them fast.

They shouted round him that he was in for initiation, lifting torches to look in his face and laugh, all in good-natured spirit, it seemed. Cameron made the best of his humiliation, and accepted it as it came. He told them to go the limit, but still advised them gravely to keep out of the forest with their torches.

"Yah! What're you givin' us, Càliban? Green trees won't burn!" said one.

Hoodwinked, they led him off into the woods, where they tied him to a tree and uncovered his eyes. Branson was not among them. Cameron believed that he had thought better of it and gone to his duty. He hoped at least that it was so.

With a great deal of horseplay they put Cameron through the degrees of their impromptu ritual, Joan holding out of it, laughing at the figure he made, none of them getting as much fun out of it as they had expected, owing to the docility and good humor of the subject. Their folly at last exhausted, they announced to him that his novitiate would end at daybreak, and until that hour he must stand bound as he was, his back to the tree.

He saw them go winding through the trees with their careless torches, full of the daring of their great adventure. Joan was the one who had originated that last penalty, he knew. It was to be his punishment for interfering with and spoiling her plans. Yet he did not believe that they could be so careless of another's comfort as to leave him bound there until dawn.

Their voices came to him from the camp, dim and indistinct. The intervening foliage was so thick he could not see the light of their fire. In a little while, he believed, some of them would come back and set him free. It was a

good enough prank in its way; it didn't matter much.

Joan, the little disdainful beauty, had set that punishment for him, he was sure. At that, he hadn't any anger for her, only a slow smile stealing over his lips as he stood there in the dark, one little triangle of clear sky visible through the pines, and in that place a star.

Handsomer than he had expected to find her—more in her face, far more. Dreams were there, and the provocation of dreams. Dreams! They came easily to him; they were his dissipation on his lone mountaintop. While he waited for the jesters to come back and set him free, dreams began to rise in him like a warm, scented vapor from his heart. So he passed an hour, scarcely impatient at the long delay, the cruel prolongation of the joke, it was so pleasant to have something new to dream about, a new face to frame in the gorgeous colors of his fancy, a face——

Every muscle in his body stiffened, every hair on his head began to crawl at the roots. A little wind, prowling around the bole of the mighty tree to which he was bound, carried to his nostrils the dreaded scent of fresh resinous smoke! A coal had fallen from a torch somewhere in the woods behind him; he could see it in fancy, although it was hidden to his eyes, lying there glowing feebly a while, running from dry needle to dry needle, spreading like a spark in tinder.

Now the wind had come and fanned it; a little flame was reaching up in wavering wonderment, kindling deeper, spreading wider, soon to leap in hungry triumph to its certain strength and surge roaring through the startled woods.

There! The light of it sprang like his quick, hot thoughts, wavered palely on the trunks of the trees before him, sank, rose, grew in its yellow gleam. Smoke came in a sudden volume, flung round him by the fire-drawn wind. The sound of the hungry fire crunching the little dry bones of the forest came to him, the low, soft snapping of its rapid kindling, and now the first warmth of its climbing flame.

It was behind him; he could not see it. Still a little fire that a man could whip out with a bough of pine and trample under his feet. Give it thirty minutes more, and it would be climbing ropes of pitchy smoke toward the green boughs.

Cameron shouted. No answer. He pitched his strong voice to its highest, calling: "Fire!"

There came no response from the camp. The noise of the fire was growing with little sharp explosions, little prolonged whistlings like the distant shriek of shells. It was hotter as the increasing wind drove the eddying smoke around him, shielded as he was by the great tree at his back. He began to feel concern for his situation, bound there helpless in the track of the growing fire.

He shouted again, and shouted till his dry throat gave up its alarm in husky falsetto. It seemed that he called out of a vacuum, beyond which sound could not reach. It was so hot now that the sweat that had drenched him dried on his face. He could hear the fire close to the tree; now and then he could see it as a fragment of flame leaped like a fish after a fly to feed a moment on the gases which rose out of the resinous fuel.

He cursed the contrivers of his peril, turned and strained to break his bonds. He feared, with a fear so great that it chilled him in his heart, that the fire would be upon him in a moment more, shriveling him there, a sacrifice to the foolish sport of those light merry-makers who lay asleep, comfortable in the thought of their own daring. Such a useless way to die, such an unreasonably useless way!

A gust of wind drove flames past his face; they curled in the eddy, lapping round him like the ends of a blowing scarf. He tried to bury his face in his bosom, striving at his ropes until it seemed the effort must burst his heart.

In a moment it passed. A little cool wind came finding its way to him, like hope whispering to his frantic senses

to be calm. Again the rush of fire, stronger than before. From this side it leaped round the tree and licked at his face; from that. His clothing was on fire; the heat contracted the skin on his face until he felt it crack. Smoke, scorching, heavy with pitch, packed his lungs. There was no air for him to breathe.

He surged at the ropes with the intensified strength of pain, fire red in his eyes, fire like a wind in his hair; surged with chin pressed against his breast, with eyes starting in the strain. Fire was in the ropes behind the tree, where it had been busy before its first wild tongue had licked his cheek. They gave at his straining now; he pitched forward on his face.

Life swept back to him again as he felt the ropes go. He rolled away from the tree, shaking the burning cords from him, struggled and crawled, half blinded with smoke, into the free air. There he smothered the fire in his garments, felt of his singed hair, turned himself as if to see that he had come whole out of that fiery initiation.

His eyes were unharmed, save for scorched lids, for he had kept them closed through the agony of his burning; his hands were whole, for they had been close to the tree trunk, and shielded from the blaze. So his peril was past, and he was still fit for the work ahead. Without a moment's pause, he set about it, striking a line for the camp where those who had left him in that unknown peril lay sleeping, satisfied in the great sport they had enjoyed that night.

CHAPTER V.

They were all asleep in camp. This evidence that they had intended to leave him bound to the tree until morning did not sweeten Cameron's temper as he went rousting the men out with sharp orders to get dressed and stand ready to fight fire. Even Nimrod Smith was snoring in his tent, in exactly the same position, indeed, that he had lain when the revelers carried Cameron off to the woods.

The fire was still confined to the accumulation of needles, cones, and fallen branches, for it was a quiet night. Unless the wind should freshen and drive the flames to the treetops, Cameron felt that he could confine it until more competent assistance than the material at hand could be sent in from Waverley. Once in those resinous boughs, no power of man could check it. It would rage in a hurricane of fire until rain fell or it swept to the limits of the forest and died for want of fuel.

Cameron was a grim and stern figure in the light of the lantern that Nimrod Smith came carrying from his tent. His hat was gone, his hair was crisped until what was left of it stood on end, his face was blistered and swollen. He did not stop to lecture the campers, but told them in few words what they had done and what they must do now to stem, if possible, the progress of the fire.

He ordered the cook to assemble all buckets, pots, and pans that he had, then sent him to rouse the women and instruct them to be prepared to leave the tents at a moment's notice. If the wind should rise, the fire might spread to the camp in a matter of seconds. The one place that would offer even a doubtful safety then would be the creek.

There was no protest from the men as Cameron detailed them off to their duty, some to carry water from the creek—it was almost half a mile from the fire—to wet the gunny sacks of the others who were to try to beat out the flames.

They fell to work with a disposition to make up for the damage they had done, with curious glances at Cameron's burned face and hair as he strode up and down the line of fire directing their frantic labor. None questioned him on his escape from the trap in which they had unwittingly fastened him, but it was plain that some of them were doing the deepest thinking they ever had attempted in their lives.

It seemed a task equal to baling a river dry to stop the fire. The accumulation of débris was three to five feet deep on the ground, and the farther the fire intrenched itself in it the

more tenaciously it held. They would beat down the flames on the spreading flanks for a few rods, only to turn at Cameron's shouted command a few minutes later to see it kindling again.

They worked willingly until their vigor began to slack. Then Cameron drove them without mercy. Morning was still a long way off, but if the wind would lie still he knew that he could subdue, or at least confine, the fire. The one great question was the ability of his impressed force to last.

While it was discouraging to them at sunrise, Cameron saw that the fight was won. He excused two of his force for breakfast, with instructions to be back at work in half an hour. They failed to return within the limit, and Cameron sent two more with sharp orders to hurry the first two along. He pitched into the work that they had dropped, making up for all of them, and something in excess. In his eagerness to finish what was so well under way he did not notice, until he had been working nearly another half hour, that he was at his labors alone.

Not a man was in sight. Those who had gone to breakfast had failed to return, and the others had sneaked after them. Cameron stood a little while, watching the fire. It was safe enough for the present, confined to a small area, burning slowly.

At camp he found them in a state of insurrection, Joan Drummond the backbone and spirit of the revolt against his authority. They were not going to do any more, the men said. They had done all that it was humanly and physically possible for them to do; they were, to a man, "all in." The fire was safe, anyhow. If it wasn't, it would have to burn. Joan said nothing, but she stood back of the rebellious group, defiance in her face.

Cameron had borrowed a hat from Nim Smith. It was two sizes too small, and topped his burned and blackened raiment off with a ludicrous touch provocative of laughter. But of this incongruity he was not aware. He took off his hat as if to administer or receive an oath, stepped nearer the group of weary, beaten, sore-handed, and blistered young men.

"Gentlemen, do you know the penalty for setting fire to a national forest, either intentionally or through carelessness?" he asked.

Nobody seemed to know; nobody seemed to care. He looked from face to face for an answer, ignoring Joan, whose guilty conspiracy against him he understood as well as if he had been there to hear her urge them to drop the fight against the fire.

"It is a felony, and the penalty is imprisonment," he said. "Now, gentlemen, you've rested long enough; you're going back to put out that fire!"

"We're going to break camp this morning; I want them to help Nim load the wagon," said Joan, scorning him so deeply that the abasement of addressing him appeared to give her pain.

"We're going back to Waverley today; we need them to help us here," Mrs. Drummond added, a finality of supreme authority in her manner that would seem to admit no question. "They were not under any obligation to help you in the beginning, you dropping your cigarettes and starting the fire!"

Cameron's burns were beginning to give him pain, now that the stress of danger to the woods was past, and his mind had time to come back to such a trivial consideration as his own damage. Added to that was his determination that the young whelps should pay, with every ounce of strength in them, for what he had suffered through their heartless prank. He passed over both Joan and her mother with a manner as high as either of them could have commanded, and put his ridiculous hat on his singed head again.

"Get back to work!" he said.

"Go on and chase yourself, you squirrel cop!" said a youth near him, twisting his lip in defiant sneer.

Cameron struck him so hard he didn't even grunt, caught the next nearest one by the neck, turned him, kicked him, sent him stumbling against a tent. Two of them fronted him, making a good show of defense, one of them landing a

sharp blow in his puffed and tender face.

But what Cameron had to square with them first and last would have carried him through a regiment of them. It was over in a whirlwind of arms and legs. Cameron slung his revolver down on the three who were making for their tents after arms. Back of the mix-up there was the screaming and clamor of the women, and from Nim Smith's quarter a crash of crockery and a thunder of pans as he came like a wolfhound to get his fist into the fight.

There was nothing for him to do when he reached Cameron's side, a long knife in his hand, his sleeves rolled up on his bony arms, looking little more like a pirate than he felt. For Nim loved a fight as he delighted in the sounds of music. All the little men in the Bitter Root country had whipped him—he was the special mark of little men—and in the fifteen years that he had been fighting there he never had won a battle. But his spirit was unconquered, no matter how much his body had been bruised. He looked round the camp now with a stoop in his long body, turning up his right sleeve a little higher, his big knife gripped fiercely, a glare in his eyes.

"Throw 'em to me! I'll cut 'em up as fine as cat hair!" he declared.

Cameron, free with kicks and cuffs, his big gun in his hand, rounded the gang up again, bloody noses and all, and marched them off to work. There was not another word out of them, although some went waveringly, and the one who had caught the ranger's first full wrath still lay huddled where he fell.

Murmurs of indignation and pity followed them as they went back to their hot work, the women still grouped back against the tents where they had drawn like frightened hens when Cameron began beating discipline into his unwilling crew.

Nim Smith, his big butcher knife in his teeth, was trying to shake some life into the knocked-out man. Some of the young women, mistaking his ministrations for preparation to administer the coup de grâce, shrilled an appeal to Joan. Joan was looking after Dan Cameron, marching behind his battered crew, revolver in his hand. Her face was white, her eyes very wide open and bright, as if she had been stirred to the foundation of her soul by what she had witnessed. Whether it was a sensation of outraged astonishment, and her posture one of unspoken protest, or whether there was the tincture of admiration for the sublime savagery of the man, none in that company could read in her face. Perhaps it would have been equally inscrutable to wiser ones in a calmer moment than that.

She turned a brief glance toward the insensible man, saw Nimrod pick up a bucket of water and souse it over him as if he cooled a hog. Then she faced back again to watch after Cameron, driving the pampered sons into the haze of the forest fire.

The man on the ground roused under Nimrod's restorative, sat up, nursing his head in his hands. The ladies, moved to fresh pity by the sight of his distress and bloody countenance, went to offer comfort. Smith sent them away, lifted the dizzy hero to his feet, and headed him toward the burning woods.

"Hep!" said Nimrod. "Hep, hep, hep!"

With each "hep" he made a feint at the young man's ham with the butcher knife. Under that stimulant his recovery was rapid. He moved off with considerable spirit after the first few rods. Mrs. Drummond groaned.

"It's the mercy of Providence that ruffianly ranger didn't kill any of them!" she said.

Joan turned from looking after him. Her hair was in disorder about her cheeks and neck, a strange expression of deep thoughtfulness had come into her face, a dreamy, farseeing light into her eyes.

Mrs. Drummond stood looking over the late battleground, which was strewn with hats, shirt sleeves, and even one whole garment that Cameron had snatched from its owner's back. She shook her head, making a little low

clucking with tongue against her teeth which seemed an expression of her inability to put her deep feeling into words.

"If I had been told that such a man as that ever lived, I wouldn't have believed it!" she said.

"Neither would I," said Joan softly. She left them, seeming to walk on the air, her eyes were so fixed and dreamy above the things of that disordered camp.

It was past noonday when Cameron excused his brigade of tired but respectful fire fighters. He had kept them at it until satisfied that the last smoldering ember had been drowned, the last deep-buried spark put out. Even then he had held them on as sentinels for an hour or two, waiting for the wind to spring and discover any coal that they might have overlooked.

After the ranger had refreshed himself with the first food that had passed his lips in nearly twenty-four hours, he went down the creek to the camp. He saw Nimrod Smith lying in his tent like a tired warrior as he passed. The accordion was under his cot, its secret discovered to all who might pass that way, for the gunny sack that had clothed it had been commandeered by Cameron as a weapon against the fire. Nimrod had been a willing and valuable assistant in overcoming the fire. Cameron was sorry, for his sake, that he had to break in so soon again upon his repose. For only part of the hard lesson that the ranger had laid out for them had been tasted by the sowers of fire in that camp.

Mrs. Drummond was sitting in the sun in her rocking-chair, daintily stitching a microscopic hole in the heel of a pretty silk stocking of color too youthful to associate its slender length with her own mature leg. He did not marvel to see her at this homely task, for he had heard of the struggle that Drummond and his wife had gone through in their early years at Waverley. He liked her better for the glint of her quick needle in the sun, for her adroit management of the gossamer floss of silk. She paused in her work at his approach, looked up at him severely, waited for him to speak.

"Madam, I don't want to appear dictatorial or oppressive," he said, "but I have come to ask you to pack up and prepare to leave for Waverley as soon as possible. It is my distasteful duty to escort this party out of this forest reserve."

"Do you mean that we have to go to-day?"

She flared up a little with the question, for, tired and indistinct as she seemed, there was a good deal of spirit in her when it came to defending her privileges of position. People who have had little and come into much are that way. They fire at the least trespass on their rights and reservations, which they keep always in the foreground of their uncomfortable minds. Mainly they are rights and reservations which they never use, kept about them like junk which one clings to for its associations of past consequence.

"Within the next hour, madam."

"We'll not go to-day!" she declared, with lofty conclusion. She turned back to her work in an angry little burst of stitching, her lip trembling with her feeling of outrage.

"You will please have the men called, madam"—there was not one of them in sight; he knew they were asleep in their heavy fatigue—"and tell them I will return in one hour to lead the party out of here."

"We've only got one wagon, and there's only room for the ladies and the tents and things in that. I don't care what your authority is, you've abused it, and you'll hear from your superiors on it, too, young man! It's out of all Christian reason to expect those poor boys to get up and go tramping over the mountains after all they've done."

"I'll call Smith as I go by, and start him hitching up," he said, ignoring her protest with gentle dignity.

"We'll not move a foot out of here till these poor tired boys have had a good night's rest, authority or no authority!"

"We'll do what the ranger says, mother."

The canvas of the tent behind Mrs. Drummond rustled, the flap parted, Joan stood in the door, a disheveled look about her which told that she also had been making up with a nap for the broken night.

Cameron had felt all the time that she was there behind that cloth. Some magnetic prescience made him aware of her, of the warmth of her, the vigor of body and mind. It is hard for a man to ignore beauty, even disdainful beauty. Cameron felt his inclination to turn toward her pulling upon him like a boat its mooring line.

But he ignored her, just enough of her in the tail of his eye where he stood, back partly to her, to tell him that her hair was down and that she was winding it up on the back of her head and that she wore a flowered kimono. There was some hardness in his breast against her for the part that she had taken in his torture, deep censure for what seemed her lack of womanly sympathy which permitted her to allow them to proceed to such cruel length.

Still more than that, he was ashamed of his blistered, fire-reddened face, grown much worse since she saw him early in the morning, but ashamed for her blame more than his disfigurement. Put what excuse he might on his stubborn refusal to turn and acknowledge her bending to his authority, in his conscience he knew that it was above all because he wanted to conceal from her what he had suffered at her hands. He was too generous to hurt her with that unspoken rebuke.

The sun was already behind the mountains when the party started out, Cameron leading down the rough old logging road. The men of the party, leg-sore and heavy for want of rest and sleep, were paying the weighty penalty for their hour of fun at his expense. Coming up from Waverley it had been a pleasant jaunt for them, camping every few miles, their expenditure of effort measured to the requirements of sport. But this was work; it was the burning essence of all the intensified labors of which they ever had heard.

Cameron intended that it should be hard for them, just as hard as they could bear. When men learn through pain and privations, they remember. Never again in their lives would one of that number carry a careless firebrand into a dry forest.

It took them four hours to march to old man Haines' claim, where they arrived long after nightfall. Cameron saw that they were not able for even another mile, or he would have screwed it out of them, so he gave them permission to camp in the clearing there. The sorely punished gallants pulled blankets from the wagon and threw themselves on the ground to sleep, leaving Nimrod Smith and the ranger to put up the tents for the women.

CHAPTER VI.

Everybody was in better humor next morning. Old man Haines had put a poultice of white of egg on Cameron's burned face the night before, and it had wrought healing and soothing wonders. Almost normal in appearance, the ranger came among them shortly after sunrise, pushing the loading in his vigorous way, a manner that seemed so stern and uncompromising, so hard and unsparing of human weaknesses to which his own rugged frame was stranger.

But none knew better the physical limitations of the men in that party than this brown ranger with seared face and singed hair. By the logging road it was fully twenty miles to Waverley, although little more than half that distance by the way that Cameron had come over the mountain. Every man among them was as stiff as old leather, their hands blistered until they held them as if there were bees between their fingers. By night their feet would be little better off, Cameron knew. That would be the third and last lesson, and a complete education for them, Cameron hoped.

The ranger was surprised by the affability of the ladies this morning. Their reserve toward him had softened, their fear of his savage exterior had dissolved. They asked him questions,

but with the deference for one whom they had to stand away from and look up to at a distance to get an understanding of his proportions. They tried to sound him and find out about him, beginning to suspect, no doubt, that under his singed shirt he was nothing but a big, soft-hearted man.

Cameron was not a man with a mouthful of words and a mind like a saucer. He had been a good many years at that work in the solitudes; the somberness of forest stillness had gone deep into his soul. There had been times in his long watches alone when he would have sacrificed much for the sound of a woman's voice, but he needed no wax in his ears to keep him against their seductions when he came down into the world.

So he let them talk around him, a little softness in his face very near to smiles now and then, as he helped Nim Smith make the load fast for the rough traveling that lay ahead. Joan seemed a bit surly, although she gave him good morning when he came her way.

Cameron was still making shift with Nim Smith's hat, the band of which he had slit to stretch it. This operation had caused the ample brim to ruffle at the sides, with a rather frivolous effect. But there was no humor left in the colored hatbands to edge them up to this natural advantage. No matter for the softening of the ladies toward the ranger, they remained unforgiving. He had humiliated them in the sight of those who had believed them valiant and strong.

The girls knew his name this morning, thanks to Rodney Haines, who had given up what information he held regarding the big ranger.

"What made you come here and bury yourself in the mountains like a hermit, Mr. Cameron?" one wanted to know.

Cameron looked at her a moment, as if debating what he should say—that little softening in his face which told them that he was not so much to be feared by women as by men.

"Maybe the love of a lady," said he.

They drew a little nearer as he knotted a rope securing a bale of tents, and laughed over his jest, not one of them but believed there must be something behind his lightly spoken word.

"You're a college man, too, Mr. Haines said. A Western college?"

"Mainly," said he, his head bent over his task.

"What college, Mr. Cameron?"

Cameron turned from the wagon, a look in his face like that of a prophet who has held communion with the infinite, a solemn, lofty look that went over their fair heads there in the morning sun; swept his arm with a slow, wide motion embracing mountain and valley and towering pine. He said nothing, but turned and walked away from them with a stately dignity that made royal robes out of his scorched raiment.

Joan looked after him with a strange lifting in her heart, as of a tender desire to reach out to him and know and understand him. He had expressed much in that look and gesture; for one moment he had drawn aside the mantle of his soul. When they came to start, she approached him with evident timidity, a questioning in her hesitant manner.

"I've given my place in the wagon to one of the boys who isn't able to walk," she said. "Do you care if I walk on ahead with you?"

A look of startled concern flashed into Cameron's face.

"I'll get a horse from Haines," he said. "You can't walk it; I never intended it should be a hardship for you."

"No hardship. I've walked over these mountains many a day." She extended her foot, shod in broad, heavy shoes, lifting her short skirt a little to show him how well she was prepared.

"I'd rather you'd take the horse," he insisted, hoping sincerely that she would consent. For he did not want to be catechized; he didn't want her to pry into his life, his failures, his hopes, as the others had attempted to do in their light, bantering way. He knew that she would not go about it as they had done. Besides, there was the blame that lay on her account for his burned face, for those minutes of agony when he had groaned in the fire.

He didn't want her to know that it had happened that way; he didn't want anybody to know. The fact that she was mainly the responsible one hurt him like gross ingratitude from somebody trusted and dear. It seemed to him that it would be petty and unmanly of him to let her know that he had escaped death only by seconds, bound as she had left him in the pique of her interrupted plans. He determined that fire again could not draw the truth of it from him. If she should question him he would lie and stick to it forever afterward like a man.

She would have it no other way. So they set out ahead of the wagon, Cameron yielding his pack to Nim Smith's care on the cook's earnest solicitation of the trust. The wagon came slowly, for it was a rough road, with rests at hilltops, with much stopping to lock the wheels with log chains before plunging down the steeps.

There were four horses in the team, and twenty miles ahead of them for the day's work. But Cameron had softened a little himself in the sun of human association. Before starting, he told Nimrod that in all likelihood they would not attempt more than twelve miles of the rugged journey that day.

Rodney Haines and the few people living beyond him were the sole travelers of that road, save on extraordinary occasions like this. It wound in and about the trees, following the clear spaces which would admit the passage of a wagon through the forest gates—jutted here to round a fallen tree, swung sharply there to escape the plunge into a sudden ravine. Mottled in shade and sun that morning, it was a pleasant road to set the foot upon, the tall, clean-bodied trees, topped with their cool plumery high overhead, standing as motionless and silent as if they had gone to sleep.

At times the wheels of the wagon were muffled on the fallen pine leaves; again the vehicle went crashing over the bowlders with a thousand splintered echoes. The young men with their blistered hands, sore muscles, tender feet, limbered up to the walk in a little while. They began to show some interest in life as they followed the wagon, but not enough of it to carry them ahead into the company of the ranger whose knuckles they had felt.

Joan wound round her objective like the road in her conversation with Cameron as they led the way, sometimes quite near the wagon, sometimes far ahead out of sight. She flitted from one triviality to another, and his desire to be agreeable resulted in such an expenditure of words that he thought he should be bankrupt before they ever came halfway to Waverley.

He knew by the furtive study that she made of his face from time to time that she wanted to ask him about his burns. It was good to know that she was not insensible of her responsibility in what might have turned out a dismal tragedy; but he could not put away at once all the hardness of blame, lovely as she was, and ready to make amends. He hoped that she would not ask him about it, for he was such an awkward liar.

But on the heels of that hope came her courage to ask him. They had stopped a little while, listening for the wagon, for Cameron hadn't much confidence in Nimrod as a driver. He was uneasy when the wagon was out of sight unless the sound testified that it was coming on and all was well. Now they heard it strike a stretch of stony road. As they turned to go on, they came face to face. Her eyes held him, suddenly so serious in their appeal; she put out her hand as if to touch his arm.

"Mr. Cameron, did you—were you—I mean, did they forget to go and untie you that night? Did you get burned there at the tree when we left you?"

"I broke loose long before that," he said, a lightness in his words that seemed scorn of their efforts to hold a wild and woolly man like him in mere ropes.

She sighed—such a big, generous sigh that it admitted no question of her genuine relief.

"I'm glad of that. I thought you got burned there—it's been a nightmare to me."

"The wind whipped a blaze in my face—you know it will do you that way in a second. It doesn't amount to anything."

"I'm glad it wasn't the other way." She stopped, looking him frankly in the eyes. "It was a foolish piece of business; I shouldn't have let them do it, much less taken any part in it myself. I didn't know you then, you know, Mr. Cameron. I thought you were just a——"

"Savage."

She colored prettily. "We all thought you were a little bit overimportant, you know, Mr. Cameron. We didn't understand. But I have understood since you—since you came to camp after them yesterday morning and made them go back to work."

"Never mind it, Miss Drummond. It's past and done; there's no need stirring old embers."

"You'll not hold any lasting prejudice or blame against me, Mr. Cameron?"

He smiled, offered her his hand as man to man when differences are put away and forgotten. The wagon almost discovered them in their truce. Nim Smith was putting the horses to a trot on a little level stretch of road, inflicting some punishment of his own on the bunch that trotted at his tailboard. Rocky ground intervened in their behalf and gave them a respite. The two in the road went on.

"Isn't there a shorter way over the mountain, Mr. Cameron?"

"Yes; but not for a wagon."

"I didn't mean for a wagon. How much shorter?"

"Half the distance, or less."

"We could be in Waverley by noon if we took the cut, couldn't we?"

"I expect we could."

On again in silence a little way, the wagon thundering after them up the steep.

"Let's take the short cut!" she suggested, stopping suddenly, a sparkle of adventure in her eyes.

"I told Smith we might not try to make it to Waverley to-day," he said, not fired by her suggestion, from all outward indications. "They'd be starting another fire if I left them in the woods alone to-night."

"If they started any fire," she laughed, "it would be from the wagon wheels, mother crowding Nim ahead to get to Waverley before night. She'd never let them stop out there another night without me—don't you worry!"

Secretly the proposal appealed to him. He wanted to get to Waverley as soon as possible—first, to get himself a decent hat; second, to report to Montgomery on the fire, and get absolution from blame on account of Branson's delay. He was heartily tired of that crowd with the wagon, besides. But he did not discover any corner of his mind to her.

"It's rough going over the mountain, Miss Drummond."

"I know. I like rough going."

His hope for her was that she never would have much of it as he watched her quick feet finding their way with sure step among the stones. Just enough of it to sweeten her as she ripened, and give her the experience to make her judgments just.

"I can send a light wagon up to meet them and have them all home hours before they'd make it otherwise," she pursued, seeing his reluctance to trust the others alone in the woods.

"It could be done," he admitted.

"Where do we turn off?"

"Along a little way yet—if we *do* turn off."

Silence a spell, the wagon out of hearing. He stood frowning, listening.

"I hope he hasn't broken a tug."

"Oh, he'll fix it, all right. Are we nearly to the turning-off place?"

"There—just past that big cedar."

"Why, the trail's as plain as day!"

"It begins plain enough in its intention, like some people's big undertakings, Miss Drummond, but wavers out to nothing before it goes a mile."

"Then you'll *have* to go with me to keep me from getting lost."

"If you insist on going alone——"

"I positively do, if you'll not agree to come with me."

He looked back uneasily, Nim Smith's

old ragged hat in his hand, his brows drawn in a frown.

"You never could find your way alone, Miss Drummond."

"No"—with a resigned sigh—"I'm sure I couldn't."

"So"—another look back, his face brightening at the sound of the wagon—"I guess I'll have to go with you. But I hope a chipmunk doesn't attack those boys."

"That's about as likely as any other danger," she laughed.

"Don't you suppose your mother will be worried when she doesn't see you in the lead any longer?"

"Oh, not much more than usual. The farther ahead she thinks we are, the faster she'll make Nim drive."

"He'll tell her we've cut across."

"How'll he know?"

"I can't tell you how he'll know, but he will."

"Woodcraft, I suppose."

"Maybe. I think it's probably common sense."

She was already on the mountain trail, hurrying him along as if keen to be out of sight before those in the wagon should discover their deflection. He admired her endurance and the sureness of her feet in difficult places. Once, after she had gone leaping up a ledge ahead of him, and stood flushed and smiling at the top, he praised her for it, wondering at her agility in the unaccustomed labor.

"I got my training climbing stairs," she said, nodding gravely when he smiled his unbelief. "It's true; apartment stairs."

"I wonder where?" he said, more to himself than to her.

"New York. That's a long time ago, before we got to be senators, you know. Mother and I lived two years in New York while I took singing. I was determined that the family should be famous one way or another. But father beat me to it."

"I didn't know that you could find an apartment in New York—one that *you'd* live in—where they'd even *permit* you to use the stairs."

"In that one they *made* you use them. Reason—no elevator."

"It must have been some kind of a curiosity, or a sanitarium or something like that."

"It was a regular flat. Nice enough, too—all marbly like a tomb all the way upstairs. But it was old-fashioned—on Twelfth Street, you know, near Sixth Avenue."

"Oh, on Twelfth Street near Sixth. Yes, it would be possible to find one along there."

"You know New York—you've been there?" She spoke almost eagerly, as if following a genealogical branch which would soon prove him to be her kin.

"I used to know every twisted fork in Childs' from Fourteenth Street to Forty-second."

He spoke with such seriousness that his words seemed to shroud a tragedy in his life. Her hand started to him again, in her quick, sympathetic way, but stopped like a dove turning from a strange cote where its welcome is uncertain.

"I've browsed all up and down there, too," she said. "Were you there long?"

"The three longest, loneliest years of my life."

"But surely not as lonely as it is here in the woods."

"I've been lonelier among millions of people than among millions of trees, Miss Drummond. I know every tree that I meet here; there I scarcely knew a soul. And you took singing? I felt that you could sing the very first glimpse I had of you."

"No, I can't," she confessed, without regret; "I only thought I could. They were rolling me for my money all the time—there are an awful lot of quacks in that business, you know. When I got up against the real thing I found I was only a squeak."

"You have had company in your disillusionment," he said, smiling at her frankness, feeling that one good turn deserved another. Besides that, her eyes were asking him what she wanted to know. "I went to New York with high intentions, and—oh, well, I *would* have accepted a job on the police force

in time, but I'd have starved before I'd have run a street car."

"I don't blame you. Anyhow, you couldn't say 'Jamaiker' or 'Thoity-thoid!'"

"No; that isn't the Kansas language."

"Oh—you're from Kansas?"

"Topeka, Lawrence, and around there."

"Mr. Branson's from that country, too. Did you know?"

"I didn't know." Cameron thought less of that country than ever before.

They went on in single file, for it was a place where the undergrowth was thick. He was leading, holding aside an interposing branch now and then. When they came to the clear again, she fell in beside him, her head bent a little, as if thinking over the glimpse that he had offered her of his life.

"I wonder what made you lapse into —into——"

"Savagery?" said he.

"Not just savagery, but—surrender, I think is what I meant. You gave it up, whatever it was you were after. It isn't the estimate one would form of you, Mr. Cameron, after seeing you bend others to your will by force."

"But a man can't wade into a bunch of editors with his fists and make them buy," with regretful reminiscence.

"Oh, you're an author!"

"No," in humorous imitation of her own frank confession of failure, "I only thought I was."

"Yes, but if you lived by your profession, even *lived*, it was a big thing, it would seem to me."

"If I had *lived!* Well, I remembered, in time to save me from robbing a delicatessen store, that I could throw a diamond hitch and pack a mule. They needed rangers in those days."

"But it would seem to me that even small triumphs, the harder won the more precious, would keep a man's soul alive."

"They're like pellets of pitch in the flame of his soul, Miss Drummond. I never have put up my hands, and I never shall. I only side-stepped to catch my breath. One of these days I'll break out again, more than likely. So now you know all about me, and there's Waverley down there at our toes."

But she knew, as he stood there looking not at Waverley but out beyond the measurable distances where men find the cirrus clouds of dreams, that he had not told her all. He had given her a vague line or two out of his life, and left her more than curious to know the rest. She wondered if any woman should ever be permitted to read it all, and warm with its high hopes, weep maybe, through the somber pages which she knew it must contain.

He left her at her door in the Park.

"You're a good traveler, Miss Drummond," he said. "A man could go a long way with you."

CHAPTER VII.

"Yes, the lad's quit us, left us to run the government the best way we can."

It was the morning after Cameron's arrival in Waverley. Montgomery was talking, his slender bow necktie more awry than usual, but a liveliness of humor in his eyes that told of considerable comfort within. Branson's written resignation from the forestry service was spread on the desk at his hand.

"Good riddance!" said Cameron. "Is he going to leave?"

"No; goin' into the lumber business, he says. Whether alone or with somebody he didn't say."

"He'd make a better undertaker. But I think he's probably going to join Silverstone, chief. One of the old pirate's cruisers brought word of some kind to him up on Big Creek the day I arrived. Nim Smith knew the fellow. They met secretly, and jumped into the brush like a couple of cats when we made a racket."

"You don't tell me!" A look of puzzled displeasure crossed the supervisor's face; he lapsed into a thoughtful silence.

"Silverstone and Drummond are pretty well related in a business way, aren't they, chief?"

"Well, not to say distinctly related before the public. We don't know that Drummond is a partner in the concern,

but we know that Silverstone has made him rich for the protection he received all the years the old brigand was stripping timber from the public lands. One of them couldn't stand without the other. They're like the bears in the shield of your own State."

"There are no bears in the shield of Kansas, chief. You're thinking of Missouri."

"Just so; Missouri it is. Of course there would be no bear in the shield of Kansas. It would be stars, the symbol of men who dream in a lofty and mighty way. Well, I hope the lad may add to his fortune between the two of them, but I fear for him there, unless the senator takes him into the protection of his family. The senator was in while you were away, raisin' the smoke of Hades over my blockin' Silverstone's great and generous scheme to lumber in this reserve."

"Was he?"

"He demands my head on a platter out of hand, and says he'll go to the president unless he gets it. He suggests that I step down like a gentleman, without any more bother to him at all, seein' that I'm doomed."

"So the whole gang's after you now."

"And I suppose they'll get me in time, lad. Let 'em. They'll cut no stick of timber in this reserve that they don't pay full value for while I'm here. Maybe they'll get a man to their likin' after me, or maybe they'll throw it all back into the public domain. It matters little; they'll have it in the end; they'll eat it up between them in their all-devourin', devastatin' way of gain and ruination."

"Yes, they've even got their backers away up in the hills."

"Old man Haines and them. Yes, I know. And every dive keeper and thimblerigger I pass on the street here gives me a look as black as a witherin' curse. We've ruined the industries of the country with our conservation schemes, they say; we've taken the gangs of lumbermen they used to fatten on away."

"They ought to be satisfied with what they get out of the miners."

"There's none in the world so easy as the man of the woods. One big highlonesome a month it used to be for them, everybody in town holdin' his hat to catch the dollars that came rollin' down the hills. No wonder we're unpopular here."

"Well, I suppose it's Timberline again for me," sighed Cameron. "We'll never get that telephone line now, chief."

The light died out of Montgomery's face. He seemed older, with all his worries back in it, the gray ashes of them on his temples.

"Never. The senator says a bit of a fire now and then in the woods is a good thing. It keeps down the undergrowth and makes lumberin' easier."

"Their eyes are fixed on it—they still consider it their domain."

"And I must send you back to Timberline in the solitudes to watch it for them and keep safe their sacred inheritance. I wish I could spare you a week off to limber your tongue, but I think you'd best start in the morning."

"To-day, if you say the word, chief."

"No; take to-day and walk the streets and look the girls under the bonnets. Meantime, let us pray it rains."

Cameron did not tell the supervisor that there was only one bonnet in the town that he cared to look under, no matter for the bright eyes which they might shadow. He scarcely was frank enough with his own conscience to admit that, for the prejudice in favor of Joan Drummond had grown against his solemn desire. While in a democracy of men there is theoretically no aristocracy of love, Cameron knew that the best he could hope for was to look again in her eyes and pass on his solitary way.

Senatorial daughters are not for foresters who range the rugged hills with socks drawn over their corduroy breeches, especially when the pockets of the garment are empty. With Branson it was a different case. There was money back of Branson somewhere, it was said—somebody waiting for the bell. Branson carried that fact around with him; that accounted in no small measure for his arrogant independence, no doubt. A man can be contemptuous of the strivers among whom he is temporarily placed if he is reasonably cer-

tain that somebody is accumulating and storing away for him.

Now Branson had quit the service, roughened a degree more by the experience that he had gained in it. It was all that a man like Branson could get out of a life like that. He would go into it surly and come out sour. Nature never could sweeten him. In mountains he would find only an example of unfeeling ruggedness, where every pine that drove its roots into their steeps must fight an unending battle for the sustenance it sucked out of the rocky soil.

If Branson were going to enter business, he would make a success of it, to the admiration of the one who waited in obscurity somewhere to pass on the wreckage that he had salved. Cameron could not think of Branson's forbears in any kinder light. He must have come from a line of skinflints and usurers who hoarded money in dark places and counted it over by night.

Branson would prove a worthy bearer to carry into the future the selfish traditions of his line. The best and the finest that the world presented went to that kind of man. Senators' daughters and all.

Cameron went on through the streets in this preoccupied way, his mind running in this channel, to the house where he made his headquarters during the winter months when he was in Waverley sometimes for a week together. There were a few veins still open between the ranger and the world through which occasional letters moved like infrequent boats upon a questionably navigable river. That neglected business occupied him until midday, when he looked over some of his conventional raiment of civilization and considered changing. He decided against it in the end, and took himself off to the Gray Goose Café, where cove oysters and flapjacks could be had at any hour of the day or night.

Not such a very good day for bright eyes, he reflected, rather gloomily, as he stood outside the café an hour later, comfortably possessed of the best steak the place could deliver. Now there was the cashier, very pretty in her white waist, white arms bare to the elbow, her neat dark hair smoothed back like an Indian girl's. She had smiled when he paid his bill, her glance traveling from the game warden's badge pinned to his shirt to his tanned face. They were pretty enough eyes to refresh a tired man, but not his kind of eyes. There were no eyes of his kind shooting lightning in the streets of Waverley that day. The town was a desert. He went back to his room.

At dark he almost wished that he had gone on his journey to Timberline in the afternoon. The only eyes that he had looked into, hungry as he was for them, were those of the cashier, dark and somewhat commercial in their lure, and a pair of shallow blue ones belonging to a girl on the cover of a magazine.

Waverley came to life after dark, when the miners thronged forth to try its poor pleasures. To Cameron it was squalid and flat, with its laborious dancers, its slopping drinkers, cheap gamblers. There were no romantic spenders in the place. All that came out of their heavy fists must be lured by studied wiles. Twenty deep around the tables, breathing hard at each hazard, they played roulette and faro at ten cents. It was a place of fly traps and of flies.

No wonder they wanted the lumber gangs back—those roaring, hairy, wild men who grew contemptuous of money in their hard life under the snows and sun. Cameron walked among these moles, a stranger. All the other rangers were out on their long patrols through the woods, and Montgomery never put his honest face inside the doors of these threshing floors of sin.

Shaping his direction in sympathy with his desires, as a man's feet will lead him unconsciously at times, Cameron drew away from the noise and forced gayety of the town. He was in the Park before he was more than foggily aware of the direction the leading strings of his abstraction were drawing him, gazing on home lights, breathing freely of clean air again.

There was more for him in the light of one of those modest windows, where

some honest man refreshed himself with books, than in all the illumination of the town. Here were trees and gardens and flowers white in the strong moonlight on the little lawns. Farther along, these lawns broadened, the houses stood back from the street in more exclusive aloofness, the pines on the mountainside a strong background for the architectural hash that some of them displayed. In all the drunken revelry of architectural lines, there was no house that displayed such a confusion of periods as Senator Drummond's, and none that had a setting that toned them down and adopted them in the forgiving way of nature half as well.

Cameron always had associated the house with the progression of the man who built it. There was in it the evidence of a groping beginning, with no certain plan of completion in view. It had taken on a bow window here, a tower there; a curved porch on this side, a peaked gable on that, as the ideas for them shaped in the builder's mind. The whole was an effect of solidity at the foundation, but of unsettled intention at the top. It appeared as if it stood subject to immediate revision, like a politician who veers at pressure.

It stood there in the peak of the little valley to-night almost beautiful in the comfort that its sheltered place gave it, the moonlight richer upon it than all the silver that ever came out of the glooming hills. There were roses blooming in masses along the rugged stone wall that inclosed the grounds, the perfume of them as subtle to touch the romantic treasures in a man's recollection as the faint music of a serenade.

Many gray, rugged cedars had been spared in that spot, some of them as old as their kinsmen on Lebanon which had been seedlings when Hiram, the widow's son, walked among them marking timber for the temple beams. Through them the broken gables of the senator's house were softened; through them the moonlight made dappled shadows on the rich, green lawn.

It was a pleasant place to linger by, the rose perfume streaming over the wall like a girl's blowing hair. Cameron wondered if Joan ever walked among the roses at night, and if there was a brook coming down out of that garden to carry a message to a lover. The speculation provoked a smile at the expense of his own sentimentality.

For there was no brook, and no Maud to drop a rose message if there had been twenty brooks. And so, since the rose could not come to him, he must mount her wall and take one. Out of her treasure of roses she could not miss one, any more than the smile that she had given him when he parted from her after their tramp across the mountain could leave her poor in smiles.

Just there the wall was high; a scramble up it would be awkward. He turned back to where the broad white driveway entered the grounds, the wall curving inward with it, running down presently to a level with the lawn. He entered, mounted the low wall, and walked the coping to the clustered rose shrubs. Close by them stood a garden bench, a litter of rose petals on the ground. That was her shrine; she had sat there plucking the hearts out of the roses in her lonely meditation.

Unconsciously he had taken off his hat, for the place seemed warm with her breathing presence. He might have posed there as a piece of heroic statuary commemorative of a passing phase of our Far Western life, the moonlight on his head, his rough clothing loose on his splendid frame, his belt and pistol a fitting detail of the rugged picture. He reached out and laid hold of a rose. Joan stepped into the moonlight at the end of the garden bench, her little laugh making him start. She lifted her hand warningly.

"Sh-h! Don't scream!" she said.

"I'll make a clean confession of it, Miss Drummond. I was stealing."

"I saw you coming; I hid."

"Yes. But I knew all the time you were there."

"Did you? Why didn't you speak?"

"I was a trespasser and a thief. I wanted to snatch a rose and run."

"Oh!" in depreciation of his self-magnified offense.

"You could spare me one, Miss Drummond?"

"I'll give you twenty," she said impulsively, beginning to break roses from the bush. "Who ever heard of a man climbing a wall to steal a rose?"

"Oh, I've done it, many a time."

She looked across at him, her face turned in that clear profile against the moonlight as he remembered it so well.

"I don't believe you! You don't look like a man who——" She bent her head over the roses a little, her words unfinished.

"Would steal?"

"Who is in the habit of being in love, I was going to say. What else would make a man want to pillage roses from a lady's garden?"

"Moonlight and fantasy and a natural bent for thievery," said he.

She tossed her head, as if throwing away this unworthy explanation.

"How did you know I was here?"

"I guess I heard you breathe," he told her, afraid to confess the truth.

"I must breathe like a horse," she laughed.

"I didn't mean because it was loud. I should have said I *felt* you breathe, felt your living presence."

"That's better," she encouraged. "Ouch! Now there'll be blood on your roses, Mr. Cameron."

"I'm sorry—for your hand, not the roses." He reached across the thick cluster of bush that stood between them to take the roses from her hand.

"No, not that white one—there *is* a drop of blood on it, really and truly."

"That one, above all the roses abloom in the world to-night. That drop of blood out of your heart will keep it alive forever."

She lifted her face quickly as he spoke, as if she turned to hearken to some new, sweet sound. A moment he held her hand as he took the roses from her. She drew it away, turned a little, hung her head.

"You must not get so tragic over it, Mr. Cameron," but her voice trembled for all its forced lightness. "They're only friendly roses—they could be only friendly roses, you know."

"I didn't know—I don't know."

"Only friendly roses," she said again, on a little sigh, her voice very soft and low.

Cameron's heart warmed when he believed he found something regretful in her tone.

"I'm going away in the morning," he said.

"Where?"

"To a mountaintop called Timberline, where I watch for fires."

"Timberline—I've heard of Timberline. It must be lonely there."

"It hasn't been so bad, but I'm afraid it will be pretty lonesome now. Society down here has spoiled me. When I come back, in a few weeks more," he hurried on, "perhaps I could come here again—conventionally, I mean?"

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Cameron. We never can keep on our holiday friendships, you know."

"Are they different from other friendships, Miss Drummond?"

"Oh, altogether different. They're only intended for a day, you know."

"I haven't had many vacations; I'm ignorant of the customs."

"Mother was terribly disturbed by my irregular conduct in running away over the mountain with you yesterday. And father and—others—gave it to me, too. You see, I exceeded even vacation-friendship license, and I got scolded. Senatorial dignity, you know, and—oh, other things."

Cameron's hopes, flaring unreasonably high for a few moments, sank like the oil dip lamp that his mother used to use in the sod house in Kansas when the tallow was gone out of the dish. What was he, indeed, but a forest ranger, with unbowed neck and foot-free to roam the world, that he should aspire to preference in heights such as she inhabited? It was enough that he had lifted himself from the place of one despised in her eye to this confidence—this sweet moment of confidence—with the thorny barrier between them at the garden's edge.

The thorny barrier must stand between them always. It would be folly to allow himself to love her. She had

given him a drop of her blood on a rose to bear away, and he would pour the stream of his whole heart out in bitter regret if he allowed himself to love her. In such measure would be counted what she would feel and he must suffer—one drop against the whole—if he should allow himself to break the curb of reason and love her.

There was the crimson dash of blood on the white heart of the rose. Youth was quick to give and quick to snatch away, and to-morrow she would have forgotten her tenderness—the future was foreshadowed in her words—while he might be longing in the beginning of empty days—if he should permit himself to love her.

So it would not do; in all wisdom and hope of peace it would not do. Like an echo to his thoughts, she spoke:

"I expect to be married soon, you know, Mr. Cameron."

"I didn't know." Cold seemed the moonlight, his heart suddenly empty, the world suddenly blank.

"Yes. They say it's undignified for a girl who is going to be married to act as I did."

"I didn't know you were to be—I didn't know that."

"Yes."

Ah, if she had spoken a moment sooner, if he had known it but a breath before! For love is an avalanche that sweeps away the barrier of reason. It comes in a heart throb, in the quick suspiration of a gentle breath. No matter if she was to be married to-morrow, he loved her. A word one moment before, and he might have stayed his feet on the edge of the danger, so he believed, not knowing that love is far more deaf than blind. No word of warning in all this world ever checked its precipitant folly, nor saved man or woman from the regrets of its rash descent.

If there had been one word of this before, he lamented in his heart, not knowing that libraries have been written in warning fools of love. And never yet one fool was saved a scorching by all the wisdom that they shut away. Now the sacrifice was made, the blood was on the altar. He loved her, and there was no answer to it.

"I hope—I know you're going to marry a man worthy of you," he said, with no truth in his heart as he spoke.

"Oh, far too noble and sincere for a silly girl like me," she said humbly, but with admiration and self-felicitation through her humility like a thread of gold in a somber weave. "But you know him; he doesn't need any praise from me to any one who knows him. Don't you think Mr. Branson is one of the most mysteriously romantic men you ever met?"

"Yes, I know him," said he grudgingly.

"We knew him first when he was in college—he came home with my brother for the holidays once, you know—the way so many college romances begin."

"So it's only a vacation courtship," said he, leaping out eagerly for that little hope.

"Oh, no; quite serious and lasting."

"Serious and lasting," he repeated, like a fool.

"I was afraid of him at first, for I never had seen a young man so serious and gloomily dark and grandly mysterious—that is, I was *almost* afraid. It wasn't the same as the first time I saw you, for I was really afraid of you. Nim Smith gave you such a terrible reputation."

"The old scoundrel! What did he say?"

"Oh," she laughed, "I'll not repeat what he said you lived on—what you ate, I mean. He was perfectly horrid!"

Cameron knew very well what Smith had said. It was a favorite formula of his when he desired to give a man an especial recommendation for hardihood, endurance, and all-around heroism, after his own peculiar views.

"Smith employs a good deal of poetic license—almost libel at times—in his everyday speech," he said.

"I know he does, but of course I didn't believe all he said. I'm not a bit afraid of you now."

"Thank you."

"Father was immensely pleased with the way you made those boys fight the

fire. A few lessons like that would make men of them, he said. And he also said, Mr. Cameron, that there were big places for men like you in the world. Why don't you go out after them, Mr. Cameron?"

"Maybe he's overrating me," he said. "But I expect to tackle it again one of these days."

"As Mr. Branson says, it's a fine experience for a little while, but nothing big can ever come to a man out there in the woods."

"The biggest thing he can achieve, Miss Drummond, is a victory over himself."

"And while he's doing that, something else is getting away from him. I don't believe the world is a bit richer for all the holy hermits that ever lived in deserts and caves, flagellating and starving and turning to bones."

"They didn't contribute much, when all is remembered."

"Precious little. What more can a man like you do here? Of course you have duty and responsibility, but you could do something bigger just as well."

"Well, nobody knows what's around the bend of the road," said he, thinking that the biggest thing in his life had come to him there already. It was so great and gloomy in his outlook upon it that hour, indeed, that it cut off all desire and made small by comparison everything else that the future might contain.

"You might get to be supervisor—I heard father say he was going to put a new one in—but that isn't much of a distinction, is it?"

"Nothing notable, Miss Drummond."

"I'd like to see you doing something worthy of you, Mr. Cameron." She looked into his face frankly, in a woman's way of doing when she believes that she is in the harbor, her own adventures at an end.

"I wish I might, and worthy of your good thought."

"For I like you, Mr. Cameron. I can say that, can't I, without being misunderstood, just the same as a married woman?"

"Surely."

"I liked you when I saw you whip those boys back to work, although I was to blame for their insubordination. You seemed to me a superman, but a man so sadly out of his place. You don't mind my saying this?"

"Why should I mind, when you only express my frequent self-arraignment in better phrase than I can command? I haven't surrendered, Miss Cameron. I have stayed on only because I doubted that I was quite ready, entirely equipped for the battle front again."

"Oh, you are ready; you're a host in yourself."

"You will be gone, in all probability, when I come down from Timberline with the first snow," he said reflectively, "and I'll never see you again. I'll stay in the service till the new supervisor comes, then I'll go back to the big noise. I would like you to recall me once in a while, Miss Drummond, as one who is doing the best that he can, for great things or small, wherever he may be."

"I'm glad to hear you say that! And now I know I'll hear from you again, maybe see you again, for we only walk a circle in this world, they say. And I want to ask one favor of you before you go."

"It is granted, Miss Drummond."

"That is to please put away your differences with Mr. Branson. I know there is a bad feeling between you, and I am afraid it may lead to worse if it goes on. For my sake, Mr. Cameron, for the sake of the love I bear for one and the friendship for the other, put this difference out of your heart."

"I can put it down and feel lighter for it," said he. "There really isn't anything more than what you saw at the camp—just a little passing flurry of temper on both sides."

"You'll not—fight about it, then?"

"It's not a fighting matter," he assured her, with easy heartiness.

"Then I hope——"

"Miss Joan! Miss Joan!" The Swedish maid was calling her, out on the lawn, a pretty Northern roughness on her tongue. "Tay-lay-phone, please."

"All right, Helen; I'm coming." She

lifted her hand across the rose barrier, let him clasp it for a moment, drew it away. "Good-by, Mr. Cameron, till we meet again where the Big Things are."

She glimmered a moment among the shrubbery, and was gone. Cameron, one rose only left in his hand out of all she had gathered for him, retraced the wall and passed into the street. The moonlight fell there again on the fair white rose with the crimson dash of blood across its heart. He prayed that it might not be symbolical of what the years had in store for her own white heart. He spoke to it as if it could understand:

"For she's going to marry his manner; she's not even *acquainted* with the man!"

CHAPTER VIII.

There is a melancholy comfort in a hopeless love. It results in good poetry and notable music once in a while. Always it is more pleasant, no matter for its corrosive pangs, than an unhappy marriage.

But those who are afflicted by it are no philosophers. Cameron was not an exception. He went away from Joan feeling that he was a pioneer on the dismal road, and that no man's outlook ever was so entirely without a gleam. If it had been a thing of slow growth, he reflected, he could have braced himself against it for the final shock. But it had come down on him like a bowlder on a settler's cabin, crushing him beyond hope.

It was in front of the Green Ace gambling house that he met Branson, under the light of the electric sign that made the sidewalk as bright as day. Now, on sight of Branson, Cameron had thought only of the man's good fortune, and no turning back to the unpleasantness between them on Big Creek three days ago at all.

"Hello, Branson!" he hailed.

"Cameron, I want to hear an apology from you, and that's all I want to hear!"

Cameron's first thought of it was that Branson had seen him talking in the garden with Joan Drummond, and that his jealousy was enlarging the occurrence into unreasonable outlines. He resented the thought of his espionage.

"It's the other way around, if at all," he replied, his blood rising hot in his eyes.

Branson came a little nearer. In contrast with Cameron's rough garb he was dressed like an ambassador, and he was as trim a figure as stood in the streets of Waverley that night. More than six feet tall, he was as well balanced as any athlete that has come down to us from Greece in age-yellowed marble. He was strong and supple, and mean-tempered to the bone.

"When a man talks to me like you talked on Big Creek, and goes to the length to make a move to sling his gun under conditions which insure his safety, he's either got to eat crow in public, Cameron, or fight."

Cameron's face cleared; the black clouds blew out of his heart.

"Oh, if that's all that's troubling you, Branson, there's nothing coming to you on that. If I injure a man unintentionally, or take him to task without cause, I can't rest nights till I hunt him up and make it square. I haven't lost any sleep over what happened between you and me on Big Creek, Branson."

Branson had pulled off his gloves as if clearing for action. Cameron saw that his hand shook as if an electrical current ran through him. He watched him for the quick blow that Branson had the name for giving.

The traffic of the sidewalk had drifted against them and clogged, for Branson's manner advertised that he was looking for trouble and was determined to have it. Cameron felt rather small to find himself the center of such publicity and theatrical display. Branson leaned toward him, his words in his teeth:

"Come out in the street!"

"Branson, you're a fool! I'm not going to fight you for that. You're forcing this——"

Branson threw his left foot back like a fencer giving before a lunge, drew a revolver with hand so quick that it was equal to a trick of legerdemain. The

sidewalk behind the two men cleared like a parting curtain.

"If your life's worth it, you cur, get down on your knees and ask for it!" Branson said.

Cameron had no thought for his own safety; he did not even consider whether Branson would shoot. The thing that came before him and stood like an altar in a sacred place was a white rose with a dash of blood across its petals. He could not draw his gun and kill Branson; that white rose, like a living testimonial of the pledge he had given Joan, stood between him and the deed. Deliberately, with no more apparent haste or concern in him than a man parting from another after a friendly word, Cameron turned his back on Branson and walked away.

He did not know whether Branson would shoot. Branson was not a factor in the move at all. The one overpowering thought in him was that he must go away from there, hold his arms rigid at his sides, his gun in the leather, to keep from killing Branson. He had passed his word with Joan—that he would not lift his hand against Branson. If he should turn and kill him now, it would be a monstrous barrier between them over which he could look into her eyes nevermore.

He was so concentrated in every nerve and muscle on holding his hand away from his weapon, on keeping his feet moving in that line away from Branson, that he was only dimly conscious of white faces back from the sidewalk in the street. He had taken no note of the sudden stillness of expectancy through which he passed. A man near the edge of the sidewalk drew his breath with a hissing sound.

"Hell! That's a nerve!" he said.

Lije Silverstone, gaunt as a starved cat, broke hurriedly through the crowd at Branson's heels. He caught Branson's wrist and turned the muzzle of the indecisive weapon upward.

"Put it up, you fool!" he commanded.

Branson scowled at Silverstone as if he had a mind to spend his passion on him. The crowd closed like water over the sidewalk again, cutting Cameron from Branson's sight and reach.

"Put it up!" Silverstone repeated harshly. Branson obeyed. The older man took him by the arm and marched him off through the silent and wondering crowd. "That was a bad play, Branson—as bad a play as I ever saw a man make," he said.

There was a cold sweat on Cameron. He was shaken by a deep and terrible anger for the peril that Branson had forced him to confront. There never could be a compromise with his conscience on such hard terms again.

"I'll have to kill him now; I'll have to kill him now!" he kept repeating in his mind. It beat in his brain, each throb of it a surge of anger, darkening over his soul as it grew.

He walked fast through the garish streets to get away from the force that was surging to turn him back, confront Branson, and kill him for what he had done. He had sacrificed to Joan once all that she could in reason demand. And he knew that he never could drive himself to such passive contempt for a menace to his life again. If he should meet Branson the next minute, the next hour, the next day or year, he would kill him.

Perhaps Timberline was the best place for him, all considered. And the sooner there the better, for his own peace, for her happiness, if there was any happiness written for her in the gloomy book of Branson's heart.

So it was that an hour had not passed until Cameron's foot was on the road to Timberline. In the radiance of the moon, high overhead, he passed her home, stood a little while in the shadows by the wall, faintly hoping that she might come again.

On his return she would be gone, and all the gates leading to her would be closed against him forever. The tale of Branson's treatment of him in the public street would be borne to her, and she would go with quick foot to greet him as a hero on his next coming there. The part that the rough ranger had borne for her sake would not be considered in the glamour that the romance

of Branson's deed would throw in her eyes. She would think of Cameron only as a coward, and the page where his name was written would be torn out of her life.

CHAPTER IX.

Senator Drummond was a fitting representative of a harsh and mountainous country, for he was a mountain of a man. His silver-gray hair, thick and long, his cropped mustaches, the gray clothing that he preferred in all times and seasons, gave him an appearance of solemnity quite senatorial, although there was not always the dignity of speech and demeanor to make the illusion complete.

He was a good husband, a liberal father, a steadfast friend. But there was not liberality enough in him to overcome a prejudice or revise an opinion. The friends with whom he began life in the Northwest were still his friends, although leeches and unworthy schemers, in the main. His inability to see their faults had grimed his own garments many a time, but his loyalty to them would have held unchanged if their sins had dragged him from his high station in disgrace.

He was that kind of a stubborn, blunt-headed man. No great depth to him, but a great deal of business and political shrewdness. Which is ammunition sufficient to shoot a man a long distance in commonwealths of more enlightenment and refinement than that which Drummond represented in the Senate.

Lije Silverstone was an example of the men who had been the early props of the senator's political career, and who continued first in his consideration when power came into his hands to make them rich. He had pulled a crosscut saw with Silverstone when they were young men together in the logging camps of the Northwestern woods. There were other gray men well past the middle years of life in that State with whom Drummond had shared railroad contracts when he began to rise, and still others from whom he had borrowed money on his unsupported word in those hopeful but uncertain days.

It was ten days or more after Dan Cameron had left for his post on Timberline that passengers in the streets of Waverley saw Silverstone and the senator in close conference in the latter's room at the bank. The big plate-glass windows of the senator's room on the corner were curtainless, in what seemed an ingenious invitation for all the world to pass and peer into his life. There were no secrets there, the glistening windows seemed to say; nothing going on in that bank that the most obscure depositor could not see if he wanted to post himself on the street and watch.

A few palms and ferns stood in pots along the broad window seats, the senator's soft gray hat here, his morning paper where he had thrown it down to welcome his friend. The senator sat half facing the street, benignant, solid, secure. In front of him Silverstone, his legs, as thin and hard as stilts, crossed in a close lapping like rope ends. His smoky-yellow face was furrowed like a scowl, his outstarting black eyes held the senator with a questioning stare that made him shift in his chair and turn.

"What's happened to you? Have you lost your grip back there in Washington?" Silverstone wanted to know.

"Lije"—the senator turned a pencil on his desk, his eyes averted—"I tell you he's got his hooks in deeper than you think. I don't know how it is; I don't know where he gets his pull; but he's got it."

"Something's got to be done; I can't wait till winter's on top of me to get my track laid up to Spicer Creek."

Senator Drummond leaned forward a little, looked about him as if to make sure that nobody had come in behind him.

"You've got to get something on him, Lije; *you've got to get something on him!*"

"Huh!" said Silverstone, belittling the earnest declaration.

"This is a funny administration; they're getting so they look behind every chip a man moves. Even a sen-

ator's request in a matter like removing a person as little as Jim Montgomery don't go any more—he's got to lodge reasons, and pretty damn good ones, too, I'm here to tell you, Lije."

"Well, I've started out to get him, and I'm going to do it, senator. If you can't budge him, I'll have to look around—that's all."

"If you'll bring me some evidence of crookedness or incompetency, or—oh, anything at all so it'll stick, I'll move him. Even if I don't get him fired, I'll have him sent somewhere else. That'd serve your purpose just as well."

"It's all right for you to tell me to get something on him, Jeff, and it's something else to get it. He's too poor to be crooked. He wouldn't pick up money in the road."

Drummond brightened with an inspiration.

"Put Branson on it, Lije. He knows the ins and outs of this conservation graft better than you or I. Tell him to get something on Montgomery, and I'll bet you a button he lands him."

Silverstone sat considering the suggestion, his exophthalmic gaze centering studiously on a picture above the senator's head.

"He might do it," he admitted, "but I can't figure what or how."

"It's got to be something that will stick, Lije, and it's got to be distinct and unquestionable. If there isn't anything that Branson knows of, put him to work to fix something up. If the boy's ever going to make much of a stir in this world he'll be able to figure out something."

"I'll put him on it. But it's comin' to a hell of a pass when a senator can't have a little clerk like a forest supervisor removed without a bill of charges!"

"I'm as hot to see his skin on the fence as you are, Lije, but I'm giving it to you straight. That man's bothered me over his telephone proposition so much I jump every time I hear the bell ring. Telephone lines in the woods to report fires! Never has been a fire that hurt anything in these forests in ten thousand years."

"A fire every ten years is a benefit to any forest," said Silverstone, in his word-grudging, sour way.

"That's what I told Montgomery the other day. It keeps the ground clear for lumberin'. But this conservation business—by George, it makes me tired!"

Silverstone left, occupied with the senator's proposal that he put his young partner on the track of the supervisor to catch him up in some delinquency that would be ground for his removal. For the supervisor must be removed; he must be erased from the calculation in that country, like a troublesome figure that prevented a balance.

As he passed on his way, his protuberant eyes suggestive of a microscopic vision that penetrated the secrets of men's pockets, the idea of Branson taking the leading hand in the scheme grew on him and made him tingle. Branson would know the fine points of the game; he would understand best where to set a trap for the supervisor, when to come behind him and trip him up. And there was that ranger, Cameron. If a man like that could be enlisted, Montgomery would be as good as on the shelf.

Business in that part of the country had come almost to a standstill for Silverstone. This folly of conservation had ruined it for him, had reduced it to a matter of purchasing what had stood ready to his hand for many years to reach out and take.

Silverstone jumped out of his unpleasant speculations at a hearty hail behind him, and turned to confront Nimrod Smith, who offered him a hand that looked as if it had been stranger to a mess of bread dough for many a day.

"Lije, how're you makin' it this summer?" he asked, tilting his head like a cock in his respectful attitude of pert attention.

"Only middlin', Nim. Things is dull—mighty dull."

"You ain't got erry job for a feller, I don't reckon, have you, Lije?"

"Well, I don't know, Nim; might be something in a week or two."

"I ain't turned a nickel since I was out with that campin' party Joan took up to Big Crick. Well, I did try cookin' in one of these chuck joints here, but I feel like a bear in a barrel when I'm shut in a kitchen. I'm one of them fellers that's got to have room to blow his nose."

Nimrod was keeping pace with Silverstone as the latter walked onward, hands behind his back, his thin body inclined forward in thoughtful pose, his eyes on the ground. Without changing posture or gait, Silverstone spoke:

"What do you know about Ranger Cameron, Nim?"

"Dan Cameron? One of the finest fellers that ever come down the road."

"He's got a purty good bunch of nerve, they tell me."

"Dan Cameron? That feller lives on sowbelly and sawdust, with ground glass for his *dee*-sert! Turn that man loose in the woods neckid, and he'd come out dressed in a swaller-tailed coat. He's a feller that can do things; he's your mammy's little man, Dan Cameron is!"

"Um-m-m! Next time you see him, tell him to drop in my office, will you, Nim?"

"I don't know when that'll be, Lije. He's up at Timberline on fire guard, and I don't reckon he'll be comin' out till snow flies. Was it anything important?"

"Well, it might be—might be."

"Well, sir"—with an air of far-ahead introspection—"I don't just know when I'll see Dan Cameron, Lije."

"No matter. When you see him, tell him what I said. If I'm gone back to Spokane by then, tell him to come down there. I want to see him."

"Sure I will, Lije."

"If you don't run into a job in a couple of weeks, come around."

"Sure I will, Lije."

Silverstone turned into the gullet of dirty stairs that led to his local office, and Nimrod went on, wondering what the lumberman could have in his mind concerning Dan Cameron. Nimrod felt a ripple of excitement over it, as if he had a hand in the making of Cameron's fortune, for he knew very well that it was something of importance to both Silverstone and the ranger when that shrewd old fox of the woods went inquiring after a man that way. Nimrod hoped that it might turn out well for Cameron. Silverstone had picked out more than one young man that way and set his feet on the road to fortune. He began considering whether it would be a good plan to take his foot in his hand and rack out to Timberline to give Dan the news.

The idea grew on him as he walked slowly onward. There was something big back of Lije Silverstone's desire to see Cameron; he'd bet any man a ham on that. Take a man that knew timber like Cameron knew it, and he was worth money to Lije Silverstone. Nimrod believed that it meant the dawning of Dan Cameron's fortune, and he felt that it would be an act of despicable disloyalty to a friend if he should carry that chance around with him until the snow drove Cameron down from Timberline.

Sure, he could take a sack of grub and his accordion, stopping along at the settlers' claims, where he was a well-known and always welcome figure, and maybe scare up a dance or two up in the Three Meadows neighborhood, where people were pretty thick. That would put him in tobacco money for a few weeks, and a man who had his tobacco sure always could rustle the other incidentals necessary to life. He had just about made up his mind to do it when he fairly ran into Joan Drummond, as she came sailing around a corner as white as clean snow in her pretty summer clothes.

"Why, Nim!" she said, blushing and smiling, offering her hand in the way of an old friend. "Why, I was looking for you!"

Nim rubbed his palm along the leg of his overalls and looked at it with doubtful eye before he allowed it to touch her glove.

"You don't say?" with respectful discount of his own importance in comparison with such an honor.

"Yes. Isn't it lucky I met you?"

"It sure is, Joan." Nim could address her by name without swallowing, for he had known her since the days when she used to go tearing around that town in shorter skirts by half a foot than the shoe-top length she wore that day.

"Do you know where Mr. Cameron is?" She drove the question frankly at him, although it cost her a blush.

"Sure I do, Joan. He's up at Timberline."

"Yes, I know. But do you know *where* Timberline is?"

"Timberline? I sure do, Joan."

"Do you suppose he'll be coming down soon?"

"Dan Cameron? No, he'll not come out of there till snow flies, 'less we happen to git a good rain."

"I just wondered," she said, looking thoughtfully at the toe of her shoe.

"Yea-s-s," said Nim, in a large, meaningless, polite way of keeping the conversation alive.

"The next time you see him, I wish you'd tell him, Nim, to come and see me, if you please."

"Sure I will, Joan. I'd just about made up my mind to go up on a visit to him and cheer him up when I run into you."

"That would be nice of you. If I were you, I *would* go, Nim."

"Yea-s-s, I was thinkin' I would. Was it anything important, Joan?"

Joan was as red as a peony. She stood screwing the toe of her pretty white shoe against the sidewalk as if to bore a hole in it and hide.

"Well, it might be," she said.

Nim was as soft as butter on a summer day in a moment, for he could scent a romance a mile. He was a loving man himself. He could not recall a time in his life since he was fifteen when he was not in love. But, like his fortune at arms, his encounters of the heart had not brought him much glory. Still, he stood undismayed and ready to turn after the next pair of bright eyes the hour after being floored by the last.

"Yes, I'd just about made up my mind to go up and see Dan."

"It's a long way, isn't it, Nim?"

"Oh, not so fur. I can make it in five or six days, takin' it easy—if I go straight through. But if I stop along to play for a dance or two and raise me a little t'backer money it'll take me ten or more."

"Don't say anything to anybody about what I told you to tell him," she requested, her eyes so appealing that Nimrod felt his heart turn to jelly against his ribs. She offered her hand as if in farewell, and there was something in it of a yellow tone that looked like tobacco money for many a month.

"Me?" said Nimrod, his solemn face, his drooping mustache, his surprised voice all attesting the injury that he felt at this questioning of his fealty. "I don't know what you're drivin' at, Joan. *You* never give me no word to take to Dan Cameron in your life."

She smiled her appreciation of his shrewdness and loyalty. Nim put his hand to his mouth as if to speak against the wind.

"If there's any answer, I'll burn up the road to bring it to you, Joan," he whispered, just as if what had gone before was for the public, this between themselves.

She smiled again in her thank-giving way, touched his hand, turned, flashed round the corner, and was gone.

Nimrod sighed, smiled, straightened himself up in the importance of being the repository of so much secret intelligence. Dan Cameron was coming on to be a popular man in Waverley, and in the highest of the high places, too. And if Dan was the man of spirit that Nimrod took him to be, he would pitch his watch shanty over the cliff at Timberline, when that word got to him, and strike a line for Waverley like a bee.

Nimrod reached into his vest pocket and drew forth what Joan had given him. He smiled, sighed, smiled again, brushed his mustache from his mouth with the back of his hand in hard, rasping sounds like sandpaper on a log, and looked round for a store where he could buy a cigar.

A little while thereafter, Nimrod was on his road to Timberline, the bearer of

the best news that he ever had carried to a friend in all his willing life. He had a sack of grub on his back, his accordion under his arm. His heart was happy in him, a song was rising out of his soul. When he came to smoother footing, far out of the sound of any human ear, he stretched his accordion and began to finger the keys. Nimrod never had sung with such feeling as he sang that hour. If the present Evelyna of his heart had been there she must have melted into his arms, limp in the ecstasy of love. His voice rose and quavered among the ancient pines:

"O sweet Evelyna, O *dear* Evelyna,
My love for you-oo shall never, never die-ah,
My love for you-oo shall ne-*ev*-er die!"

CHAPTER X.

Nimrod Smith had been two days on his way to Timberline, covering at the best not more than twenty-five miles a day, when Cameron discovered the first thin plume of smoke as he stood in the door of his little log hut on the rocky peak. He was uncertain of it for the first few hours, so indistinct against the strong blue of the clear sky; but as the afternoon change came into the distances all doubt vanished. It was a fire. Cameron estimated that it was in the neighborhood of Settler Creek, about midway between his lonely post and Waverley.

There was no use shifting from leg to leg and watching it through the glass, hoping that rain would come and save him the trip over there. He had to cut a line for it and put it out, if possible, and, if he could not do it single-handed, go to Waverley for help.

By the time he had cooked and eaten a hasty supper and made up his pack, the sun was almost gone from his mountaintop. Long since, twilight had fallen in the gorges below, where the forest was as dark as still water. The silence of his world seemed to portend some great disaster, the shadowed forest to stand in awe of a thing more terrible than storm or riving wind.

The darkness and dread of the woods seemed to creep up to his last illumined spot of day and steal with a coldness into his spirits. A feeling came over the ranger that he was destined never to look on that scene again as it lay in its somber majesty, the sun golden on the far mountain, the sweep of pale-green forest from that far-off steep stretching down and down like the bold, free dip of an eagle, the purple falling into gray, the gray to black shadows in the gulch a thousand yards below his feet. Up again, from gray to purple, purple to green, green to a waning gleam of sun.

As it mounted to his crag, the grave pine forest dwindled down to outposts of stunted trees, blended off to shrubs and briers, a fringing of scant grasses, the baldness of utter sterility. At the topmost rock of this bolt-riven peak his cabin stood, the last eloquent expression of human isolation. The feeling grew strong upon him and weighted him like a presage of death, that he never should stand with the green world darkening into night at his feet again.

Off there where the fire burned, thirty miles or more away, the smoke had packed against the cold, descending air, spread like a parasol, darkened in its density. Cameron was disturbed by the outlook. The indications were that it was a fire too big for one man.

Cameron was confirmed in this belief when he surveyed it from a hilltop, many hours after he had started for the scene. The fire had spread with amazing rapidity, considering that there was no wind; the red light of the resinous flames reflected in the heavens like the glow of a distant city. It covered miles in a north-and-south direction. He knew from that far-off look at it that he must push on to Waverley with all speed and bring in a large force to control it.

About the same hour that Cameron hastened down from his midnight observation to pursue his way, Nimrod Smith jumped out of his sleep with the impression in his startled mind that a bear had run over him. Something had run over him; he could hear it dashing

on through the woods. It had felt like a bear somehow, Nimrod thought; but why a bear should go tearing around so blindly, waking travelers by stepping on their legs, was a thing that he could not settle in his disturbed mind.

Only a few moments this confusion lasted. Nimrod sprang up, his conscience assailed by the most dreadful question that a woodsman can conceive: Had he neglected to douse his fire when he had rolled in on his piny bed? For the night was choking with smoke; the crackle of fire was near, the heat of it coming rolling to him, the light of it among the pines.

No. There was the spot where his little fire had been, still wet with the sousing he had given it, not an ember alive. This fire had started ahead of him, anyhow—a long way ahead. Very likely it had been a bear that had blundered over him in its flight. He could hear other creatures running away from the fire all around him in the woods, from the soft patter of rabbits and squirrels to the sudden crash of deer as they shot by in growing fear.

Nimrod began to collect his traps. That would be a pretty good place for a man to get out of when all the beasts were running. It must be a big fire, from the look of it, from the smoke and heat, and the way it had disturbed things in the woods. Creatures did not run from a patch of fire such as those pot-headed campers had started on Big Creek. When beasts left their caves and hollow logs, their lodgings and grazing places, it meant that disaster was at their heels.

Cameron would be heading for that fire, he knew, so there would be no use in pursuing his way to Timberline. Better to turn back toward the settlements at Three Meadows, which he had left the morning past, and chance meeting Cameron when he came through for help. He would need help to handle that fire, and plenty of it, from the way it began to look.

With that in his intention, Nimrod started out, not worried, for he had been in the woods before that night, in calm and storm and winter snow. Smoke was drifting and packing in the cool, damp air down the draw where he followed the little brook toward Settler Creek. It would be more comfortable on higher ground, thought Nimrod. Sure of his direction, he left the guiding stream, cut up the hillside, and ran into a line of fire.

It startled him, he broke out of the smoke and came upon it so suddenly. Not that way, then. Back down the slope, smoke stinging his eyes, burning his lungs, setting up a thirst so strong that it seemed his throat would crack before he could get to the water. He threw himself down and drank, panting for breath in the smoke-packed air. On the ground, as he lay along, his lips in the water, the air was not so foul. A little while he rested, stretched there, breathing greedily like a fish thrown back into a stream.

Refreshed, he rose. A man had to get out of that; if he didn't, the smoke would down him and leave him senseless in front of the fire. It was marching up pretty fast, faster than he ever remembered seeing a fire travel in the woods. The hot, pitch-heavy smoke was pouring out of the woods in thicker volume every moment. Nimrod communed with himself:

"About the wisest thing a feller can do is to round this blame fire and git back of it. If I go to foolin' and fumblin' around here much longer, I'm agoin' to git caught."

That stratagem decided on, Nimrod moved at once to effect it. On the other side of the little stream the land was not so rough, but there was a good deal of fallen timber, cluttering a man's legs as he hurried along, and a thick sowing of bowlders which had come down the mountain with a thousand, or fifty thousand, spring thaws.

Here appeared a break in the advancing line of fire which he hoped would lead through to the windward side. On this direction he held, not worried over the outcome, believing that he soon would break through clear of the smoke. Over bowlder, over fallen log; through bramble, across barren, down sharp hillsides, over cold, sweet-gurgling

stream. The obscurity of night was doubled by the shadow of foliage and smoke. There was never a glint of the stars, never for one breath a break in the storm of smoke.

In full confidence, still undisturbed, Nimrod worried on. Soon he must come to the end of it and wash his aching lungs with wholesome air. It didn't matter so much for directions now; he could fix his course when he came out into view of the stars again. The present work was to get up the steep that confronted him, and out of that plague of smoke. Up he toiled, sweating, his eyelids burning and dry, taking his breath short to spare the stinging of his lungs; up in torture and thirst and longing for a free, sweet breath of air that was a heavy and increasing pain; up to the top at last, to meet another line of leaping flame.

Nimrod felt his hair creep at sight of it. Here was a fire of a fierceness such as he never had beheld in all his days—fire that was making torches of the green tops of young pines, a leaping, stinging line of red fire fifty feet high. Rearing now in exultant waves, sinking the next breath to sullen intensity, streaked with its black smoke, hissing among the green boughs, aspiring with each increasing leap to seize the proud foliage of the ancient pines, rich food still far above its lapping tongue.

Nimrod was weakened for a moment by the threat of it, strengthened in the next by a desire to turn from it and run. There was fire on three sides of him; he had walked into a pocket of it, leaving open only the way that he had come. Back over that painful ground he must hasten now, this portico of torment narrowing with each precious breath.

Strengthened by his mighty necessity, he turned and ran. His pack of food was an encumbrance; he threw it away. He plunged down the slope, thinking of the water ahead, the flames behind him reaching above the summit of the hill at times, reddening for a flash the veiling smoke.

It was a long way to the brook, it seemed. Confusion troubled him; doubt shook his heart. For he was not going downhill any longer, but through a level stretch. Fire leaped ahead of him. He had missed the door!

He turned from that blaze and ran again, stumbling, torn by thorns, bruised in collision with trees which he could not see the length of his arm ahead. Direction was lost, reason was lost in a tangle of surging emotions. He ran, his desire so far ahead of him that his feet seemed weighted to the earth with stones. Here he met fire again, and turned from it with a scream of animal terror. Without plan or reason, he fought on, fell, rose, struggled. The air was tainted with fire, the elements were on fire, the earth beneath his feet was aflame.

For two things he fought in that smoky, flame-shot world—the life that struggled in his heart, the accordion that he carried tight-clasped under his arm. Holding the instrument so, guarding it as the thing next precious to his life, he fought in numb distraction to find the gateway that would let him out of that resinous pit of fire.

On the evening of the third day, Cameron reached Montgomery's office. He had not slept since leaving Timberline; he scarcely had stopped to prepare food.

The ranger told his chief how that mysterious, swift-growing fire had cut off his road to Waverley, lengthening his journey by a full day. Three days, therefore, had been spent in reporting the fire, during which time it had spread over a wide region in unbroken line. Three minutes' talk by telephone on the evening that he discovered the smoke would have started a force of men to fight it.

"It's the worst fire we've ever had in here; it spread as if the devil had run through the woods dropping coals at every jump. I believe it was deliberately planned and set, chief, two men working from opposite directions. One couldn't have covered the ground that fast."

"That's what's happened," the supervisor said. "I've been expecting it."

"It's some of these nuts that have been knocking ever since the reserve was established. I wouldn't hesitate to walk up and put my finger on one of them—old man Haines, up on Big Creek."

"I don't think any of them up there on claims had a hand in it, Dan." Montgomery shook his head a long time, as if a new sadness had come into his life that even Burns could not assuage. "It's these crooks here in Waverley that're behind the deviltry, and nobody else. They're tryin' to get something on me—that's their only hope."

Cameron jumped to his feet.

"I'll shoot the scoundrel that hired that fire scattered—I'll kill him like a wolf!"

Montgomery touched his arm in kind restraint.

"We'll come to them in time, lad. Just now you must take a few hours' sleep. There's work ahead."

"I'll bunk down in the back room for two or three hours. Don't let me sleep any longer than that."

"I've been expectin' this a good while; I've been so confident that this would be their weapon that I've been preparin' to meet it. When the smoke began to blow down here this morning, I went out and hired men. I've forty to go with you after you've had a little sleep—sawmill men, tough lads you can put through to Settler Creek without a stop."

"I'm afraid four hundred will come nearer the number we'll need before we see the end of this thing," Cameron told him gloomily. "Whoever directed the job knew the country. He knew how long it would take me to get here and how long it would take to get back with men. It'll have nearly five days' start on us, chief."

"I'll send the rest of the boys up to you with more men as fast as they come in. I've wired to the supervisor at Missoula to pick up everybody he can find that can handle a shovel, and ship a gang to me. This is going to be a big fire; it was meant to be a big one; but we're going to put it out—unless it envelops the world."

Before midnight Cameron was on his way back to the fire, his force at his heels, a train of pack horses carrying supplies and tools. But a strange cook filled the place that Cameron had counted on for Nimrod Smith. The ranger had turned Waverley over; his scouts had penetrated every retreat where a man might lodge, searching for his long-jointed friend; but nobody knew what had become of him.

CHAPTER XI.

For days Montgomery had been sending men into the woods until he had a small army of them there. From Spokane, Missoula, and even Seattle he had drawn fire fighters, working night and day, grim, cool, determined. He sent his stream of recruits to Cameron, who parceled them out among the seven rangers who worked under him. Night and day forces worked at top tension, carrying out the plans laid by Cameron and his council to check the mighty flood of fire, but it had broken over all barriers and driven them steadily ahead of it to contrive new lines.

Cameron's heart was sick at sight of the devastation. Hundreds of square miles already had been burned over, the young growth of timber consumed utterly, the large trees stripped of branches, foliage, and bark, left standing in melancholy blackness. The life was burned out of the forest over every square yard swept by this fiery tide.

Down to the hard red soil the fire had eaten, sweeping clean the rich mantle of rotted leaves, roots, branches, the accumulation of centuries. Nothing remained to give life to a young shoot again, nothing lived with a drop of sap in it to spread its greenery above that woeful scar. Those who had aimed at the humiliation and defeat of the supervisor in planning this diabolical revenge for his loyalty to his trust, had struck far deeper than they had intended, beyond any human doubt. The slow work of hundreds of years of forest building was undone already over a territory as vast as one of the New

England States, and the end was not in sight.

The end was a thing that Cameron tried to shut out of his mind. As it stood, there seemed to be but one end conceivable, and that too appalling to admit for speculation. The fire had driven his force back twenty miles or more toward Waverley. The news of it had gone out all over the nation, the smoke and ashes of it were trailing eight hundred miles. Nothing to compare with it ever had been known in the history of American forestry.

Back fire, broad trench, fire lines from which all inflammable materials were removed, all failed to stop this insatiable column of fire. Now, scorched and blistered, the fire fighters were making what Cameron felt must be the last stand. He had drawn his line five miles ahead of the fire, which, in the one mercy that was apparent in all the heartless waste, traveled slowly. There had been no wind yet, save such cross currents as were engendered by the vast vacuum above the burning woods. If it would continue to lie still, Cameron had a dim hope that he might have time to establish a new line that would hold.

So there he worked and watched, going up and down the long day and night, a prayer in his heart that he might meet the one whose brain had conceived the plot, whose hand had carried the brand. Two days more of heart strain and unceasing labor, and Cameron believed that he had it whipped. At several points the fire had reached his last broad trench, cleared down to the original soil, and stopped. Hope came up in him again like a cool rain after summer drouth. For the first time in so long that he had lost count of it, the ranger lay down that night to sleep.

That same evening, as twilight deepened, the people of Waverley and those on the farms and ranches close around the town were struck by the peculiar sense of silence that seemed to pervade the air. It was so marked as to seem a hesitancy in nature to proceed with the established order—a deep, hemming, oppressive, portentous slackness that influenced all things which moved and breathed.

Chickens left their shelters and sought quarters for the night under shrubs, in silent, stealthy, dazed manner, as if numbed by the news of some impending calamity of which the inscrutable force had whispered. This phenomenal thing was generally observed and marveled at. Everywhere that domestic fowls were kept in shelter of house or coop, they came trooping out just at the beginning of darkness, silent and fearful, to seek lodging on the ground.

It was noted that wild birds gathered in uneasy flocks, rested, rose, circled, and changed their roost, all as silent as if they were only the shadows of birds. Dogs came whining at doorsteps, to lie down and start up presently in uneasiness; lie down, move again, and stand straining and listening, as if for the first sound of the indefinable something of which they had been warned.

There was a corresponding uneasiness among cattle, which bunched in pastures and barn lots, lifting anxious heads, sniffing the wind, pressing silently together as if for courage against a strange and awful danger. Horses in barn stalls turned toward doors and windows, putting out heads; strained on halters, uneasy to be confined. On the edge of the town some reported that they had seen bear and other large creatures of the woods walking boldly, as if unconscious of any danger from man, or as if that instinctive aversion had been made small in the face of some other and greater fright.

Every creature but man, indeed, seemed to know that all nature was charged with a warning. Man could feel this subtle counsel, could grope dimly after its portent, but could not grasp it. For days the skies had been shadowed by the smoke of the still-distant forest fire, through which the sun had shone as red and sullen as a grate of coals. This evening the smoke was settling into the valley. Already the mountains inclosing the town were masked at their tops in its gray density;

the resinous scent of it was coming down into the low places.

But nobody thought of the fire as a menace to the security of the town. It was known that the rangers were back there somewhere behind the mountain, holding the fire. No uneasiness was felt. Even though it should break away from the rangers' big force of men, it must stop at the edge of the forest. There was no danger that anybody could conceive.

So night came to Waverley, the sky shut out by smoke. Its games opened, its luring lights glared, the uncertain marble clicked in the glittering wheel. The greenbottle flies which fattened on the golden sap of these delving fools flashed diamonds as they moved among the throngs.

Back in the forest, less than twenty miles away, where Dan Cameron, forest ranger, was stretched in his well-earned sleep, none of the foreboding tokens were manifest as twilight deepened. No living thing remained there of all the forest creatures to give its silent warning to the men who watched the sinking line of fire.

For thirty miles north from the flank where Cameron held the line, gangs of men labored on the last ditch of defense. At such points where the fire had not reached it, they broadened it, and stood ready with shovels and wet sacks to beat out such spurts of it as might reach across the barrier and kindle. There was confidence in the woods that night for the first time in many hard and wearing days.

There were sixty men in Cameron's camp, all of them relieved this night from work but five who stood guard along the fire line. Worn out by their hard battle, they were scattered about among the trees, asleep. A little way beyond their ditch which had stopped the fire, the burned forest glowed where the slow ground fire was feasting on the débris of fallen trunks and limbs. Now and then a flame shot high, throwing a light over the quiet camp, showing the scattered men among the pines like dead revealed by a lightning flash on a battlefield. Now and then a tree trunk fell, raising a spray of sparks which snapped and spread and died away in the dark. The smoke pressed low; the wind was as vague as a troubled dream.

The rising wind in the trees woke Cameron. Ordinarily the sound would have lulled him, like the consciousness of music through the shallows of his sleep. But that sound had been strange to the forest for many days. In its place there had been the whine of fire, the snap of long, pointed flames cracking like whips among the green boughs, the shouts of men dimmed through the vacuum of fire, the pandemonium of a world in destruction.

All doubt as to the nature of this peril from which they were preparing to flee was removed when Cameron ordered each man to soak his blanket in the little stream. The growing wind was fanning the fire into a new fierceness. It was fast becoming not a problem of staying the advance of the fire, but of escaping from the track of it with their lives.

Most of the horses had escaped; many of the men had fled in panic to certain death out of the guidance and restraint of the only hand that could have saved them. Already numbers of them must have perished under the falling trees. With the forty or more remaining by him, Cameron started to lead them their perilous way to a refuge that offered them the one slender chance for life.

The mountains had been pierced here and there by the drifts of prospectors following a dim lead of ore. These abandoned mine tunnels were known to every ranger; they were marked in the chart of every man's mind who followed these forest trails, and held against such an hour as had come upon them in that night. The nearest one was several miles distant, but Cameron believed that he could lead them to it. There was no doubt in his mind of his own ability to get to it, but whether he could hold the men under him together and give them courage to carry them through was another thing.

He was starting with them, their wet

blankets saved for a greater emergency than that which faced them, when there came staggering toward them with the wind two men, the foremost of whom walked with his arms bound behind his back. They seemed human wreckage out of this falling world, the shreds of clothing that remained on their limbs on fire.

Nimrod Smith was the one who followed the prisoner, but a Smith whom the fire had altered until even Cameron did not recognize him in that leaping and falling light until he spoke:

"He's the man that started it—I caught him at it! I'd 'a' brung him in—I'd 'a' brung him in if it'd cost me ——"

It needed no fervid imagination to complete Nimrod's declaration of the cost. It seemed, indeed, that he had paid it to the last cruel reckoning. More expressive than words was the manner in which he swayed on his legs, and his dry throat gasped as he tottered and fell.

In his determination to bring the fiend who had kindled the forest fire whole to justice, Smith had protected the fellow's face with a handkerchief. This concealed all but his eyes. Cameron turned from him and ordered the load stripped from one of the remaining horses. He tried to pour water from his canteen down Smith's throat. The merciful operation did not appear to be successful. Insensible as he was, they bound Smith to the horse, covered him with a wet blanket, and began their march.

CHAPTER XII.

Two hours before midnight the gale struck Waverley, bearing with its first strong gust a foretaste of the fire that it was driving like a wild herd through the green pine boughs. It was a blast of wind as hot as ever blew out of Sahara. Close on this summons to the people of the town to stand forth and behold, the first running flames were seen.

Even then they did not believe that danger was near. High up the mountainside the forest ended. If it burned it would be a spectacle to enliven the night.

Crowds left the dance halls and gaming tables to collect in the street and watch the fire draw near. Gamekeepers followed after, yawning with the bore of it; liquor dispensers showed their flabby bodies and scowling faces in doors, out of humor with this free display that drew the custom from their bars.

Only one man in all that careless town was fully cognizant of what the next half hour must surely bring. Montgomery, forest supervisor, sat in his office at the telephone, sending out warning to fire department and police, to the superintendents of hospitals where the sick and mangled out of the mills and mines lay in their stifling pain. Men must be stationed on the roof of every house in Waverley, he told them, with water at hand to be ready when the rain of fire began to fall.

For once in his experience in that unfriendly country, the supervisor found his word accepted without question. As the alarm began to spread, the overhead wind to dip more frequently into the valley, a change came over the people in the street. Their chatter and light banter gave way to low questioning; groups stood watching, the red of the heavens reflected on their faces.

Among the homes, anxious activity was everywhere. Men mounted roofs with garden hose, buckets of water, wet sacks. Within twenty minutes after Montgomery's first alarm went to fire headquarters, half the home owners of the town, notified by the telephone exchange, were on guard against the threatening fire.

Almost immediately scores of roofs were ablaze. The small fire department was standing by the business houses and hospitals, the public buildings and banks. Beyond that little cluster of buildings in the main section of the town there was no protection save that each individual could contrive for his own. It appeared that the whole town must be destroyed; already it was melting away like snow in the hot breath of that awful wind.

Confusion fell on the people, who shouted and ran, each one with some sudden thought or intention of property or personal safety. Women's hair caught fire, clothing blazed, the terrified sufferers rushing in shrieking panic. All was bewilderment of sound and motion. Overhead fire streamed across the heavens; underfoot fire lay in drifts against curb and stone, glowing, scattering in the vicious wind.

Smoke packed the streets like a fog. Through it the indistinct world was red. The wind gathered the junk of the town and swept it ahead of it. Boxes, barrels, signs, soaring flocks of papers, which caught fire in mid-air and were consumed, went driving through the streets. Through this blur of destruction trees could be seen bending to the ground, women with garments outspread and hair streaming, flying in utter bewilderment for the shelter they could not find. The utmost noise that man could voice in his anxiety and fright was only a whisper through this storm of fire.

Jim Montgomery believed that the town would be destroyed and that hundreds would perish in its ruins unless some head could be made of the confusion and the women and children removed from the peril. To this end he made hasty arrangements with the railroad company, which had several hundred empty cars standing in its yards there, for saving both rolling stock and the lives of the inhabitants.

The supervisor went spreading the news of this opportunity to escape. It traveled quickly; a general movement toward the railroad yards ensued. There among them Montgomery worked, soothing their fears, swiftly bringing a semblance of order out of the bewilderment which would have resulted in a sad loss of life but for him. Four long trains of ore cars carried two thousand people out of that fiery valley down to the lake and safety.

Most of those who remained in the town were men, and these appeared to be about equally divided between those intent on the protection and defense of property and those bent on its pillage and destruction. These latter were those embraced under the general term "Bohunk." Ape-browed, hairy, unwashed, they had formed in gangs for the primary purpose of looting the stocks of liquor stores. Inflamed now to baser desires by the alcohol they had downed, they roamed the town, defying the few peace officers, committing unspeakable depredations in defenseless homes.

The building in which Montgomery's office had been had burned, with all his records and belongings save the little volume of Burns in the side pocket of his coat and the automatic revolver in the belt around his middle. For the first time in his life he felt more comfort in the possession of the pistol than the book. He was standing on the edge of the riotous crowd in front of the ruins of the building, thinking what a terrible calamity the blindness of the guilty had brought upon the innocent. The three days lost by Cameron in coming that toilsome, fire-fenced way to report the blaze were responsible for the headway that it had gained. At the beginning it could have been curbed—if there had been a telephone line from Timberline.

So Montgomery thought, standing there with the heat of Waverley's burning ruins in his eyes. He turned away to face Senator Drummond, who came pushing his way through the drunken throng.

The senator was hatless, his face was white, his eyes were staring. He stood a moment before Montgomery, as if what he beheld made him dumb, flourishing his hands in the last hopeless gesture of despair. Suddenly speech broke from him:

"My God, Montgomery! My wife and daughter!"

"Where are they?"

"At home! I was in Spokane when I heard of the fire; I came on a special engine. My God! It's all afire up there. They're——" He glared at the supervisor, his hand lifted as if to strike him. "Why in Heaven's name didn't you stop it—why didn't you do something? You've stood here like a knot

on a log and let it burn everything—everything—every damn thing in the world!"

Montgomery was shorter by a head than the senator, but stronger in conscience and soul than a thousand of his kind. He took Drummond by the arm with a grip in his fingers that seemed to tear muscle from bone, shook him.

"You're the last man to come whining and cursing to me, Drummond," he said. "Come! Maybe they're safe yet."

That little section of Waverley that had been called the Park was a pocket of fire. There the forest had come down closer, there the hurricane had sown the forest fire as it swept down on the town. At the first burst of flames in the woods behind her home, Joan Drummond had marshaled the servants to protect the house.

The home adjoining, whose owner was away, was soon afire. Many others up and down the street, not protected so well as Joan and her forces guarded hers, burst into flames. The big cedars in front, licked by the down-swooping flames, were stripped of foliage. Between two fires, Joan was hard pressed to save the house. A score of times the roof caught. Joan, on the highest comb, dressed in slicker and oiled hat that one of the senator's sheep-herders once had worn, swept the stream from the garden hose over it, fighting down every spark.

Her stand against it was but one little heroic incident in a place of heroes that night. She would have put her life down to save that house, the sanctuary of her childhood recollections, the one place to which her heart winged in its desires when she thought of home. For hours she stood her post, until the wind died down and it was safe.

Mrs. Drummond, frail as she seemed, had borne her part with courage through such heat as the human body seldom is put to the test of enduring. Triumphant now, even with the sad spectacle of the blackened, stripped cedars before them, they rested, believing that the perils of the night were past. They did not know that wolves were abroad, with passions in their breasts more to be feared than fire.

When Montgomery and Drummond came in sight of the house which Joan's resources and energy had saved, the senator stopped as if he could not believe what his eyes told him.

"It's still there!" he said, on a sigh of relief as deep as his soul.

"It looks like a miracle had been wrought in that place," the supervisor said.

They advanced toward the house, Drummond looking from side to side at the red ruins of homes where his neighbors had lived, the sense of the miracle, as it seemed, that had spared his own deepening over him.

"Look at those cedars—stripped, stripped to the bone!" he said. "But the house is there, the house is there, the house is there!" He repeated it in voice little above a whisper, slowly, as if to make himself understand. "There's no light"—quickening his step as he noted this—"I wonder where——"

As if to answer him, a scream sounded from the dark house. Montgomery's heart seemed to die in him at the pleading, hopeless terror of that sound. He did not wait for Drummond to start, but was off with a leap like a startled buck. Drummond followed heavily, but was far behind when the fleet forester disappeared in the shadow of the house.

Drunken shouts, drunken laughter came from a crowd of men close by the building, a movement among them as if somebody struggled to break free. In an open door he could see the dim white figure of a woman, who stood screaming in frantic appeal. In a moment he was among the struggling bohunks, beating heads with the butt of his heavy revolver, afraid to shoot on account of the woman whose white dress he could see flash as she fought to break from their polluting hands.

Now she was free and running toward the door. Montgomery fired, having no words to spend on that scum of the world. They broke, scattered, closed for a moment around him as Senator Drummond ran up and threw

himself into the fight. It was over in a breath, for the roar with which Drummond struck right and left seemed to be more terrible to the drunken scoundrels than the sound of Montgomery's weapon.

Two of the rioters were crawling away after their fleeing companions, calling for help. In the door Senator Drummond was clasping his wife and daughter, hearing their assurance that neither had suffered any harm beyond fright.

Montgomery stood where he had fought, his hand to his breast where the stab wound of a long knife burned like a red-hot rod in his vitals. The dim world grew dimmer before his eyes, his weapon slipped from his fingers, his knees bent under him. When Joan ran to him, gratitude for the succor he had brought in her moment of despair rising like a blessing out of her heart, he was lying in a crumpled heap where he had dropped.

CHAPTER XIII.

The mine tunnel to which Cameron had led his men through that blazing forest pierced the mountainside about sixty feet. The bore of it was narrow, the mouth blocked now with fallen stones and logs. The horse that had borne Nimrod Smith's unconscious body could not be taken into the shelter. All the others had been turned loose to shift for themselves early in the fiery march. Now Cameron cut the ropes that held Smith and set this creature free to make its unguided, doubtful fight for life.

Those who first groped back to the extremity of the tunnel pushed forward again in haste. There was a bear back there, they said; they had put their hands on it.

"Go on back!" said Cameron. "You'll be glad to lie down by even a bear before you get out of this."

But they packed to the front, giving the bear his end of the tunnel alone. The first hurricane of wild fire had swept through that part of the forest before they reached the cave, and the last part of the journey had been through a bed of living coals and kindling flame that had burned the feet of some of them until they now suffered almost unbearable agonies.

From the tunnel mouth one marveled how men could have passed through that sea of fire alive. It was like looking into the open door of a furnace. The after fire was sweeping clean the débris of the first assault. Smoke had packed the tunnel, and still came driving in hot puffs which cut the breath like fumes of acid and left the lungs burning to their deepest cell.

Cameron collected such of the blankets as had not been thrown away, and made a curtain to protect in some degree the entrance. Outside, close by the mouth of the tunnel, a great log was burning. Soon others now standing must fall across it, heaping material for a fire that would try every man in that place for his endurance and courage before the passing of that night.

Insecure as the retreat was, it was the best that the woods offered. Through an ordinary forest fire it would have been a place of comfort in which a man could have laid himself down and slept with confidence. But this was not an ordinary forest fire. The whole world was burning—earth, all that earth produced, and the air that held it compressed to its form. It was a deluge of fire.

With the reserve blankets at hand, Cameron took his station at the door, waiting to smother the fire that he knew must soon lay hold of his curtain. Men were coughing and gasping behind him, beginning already their struggle against the smoke and superheated air.

"Spread out as much as you can and lie down, every man of you!" he commanded.

Only a little water remained out of the full canteens which they carried when they left camp, and that little most of them now drank, hoping to ease the deep torture of their lungs. It was hard to be patient under the misery that was driving them mad. Little by little they drew away from the tunnel mouth, at first in unconscious retreat, latterly

in frantic scramble, fighting among themselves for a place to lie with face pressed to the earth.

The bear was forgotten, or unheeded where it crouched with nose between paws, breathing on the ground. Men stumbled over it, sprawled across it, threw themselves alongside it, unresented by the wild beast which this transcendent calamity had made their equal. The highest aim of a man's life in that tunnel had become a fight for a breath of air.

So for hours they bore this unending, ever-increasing pain. Now a man would stand in the dark cave and scream until his voice broke in his parched throat and he fell again, moaning in his agony; now one would crawl blunderingly, blind with his pain, and grope with frantic hands like a wild beast in a sack, for the door. Cameron would draw him down again, with a word of hope, perhaps moistening his lips with a few drops of water from his canteen.

The ranger knew that some of them were unconscious, in the coma of approaching death. Only the strongest lungs could separate enough pure air out of that gaseous fluid to sustain life. Smith's prisoner, his arms freed as soon as they reached the tunnel, was still strong, as Cameron noted now and then when a gleam of flame sprang up and lighted a spot in the tunnel through a space that he could not stretch his blanket to cover.

Cameron was troubled at each glimpse he had of the fellow in this fitful, smoky light. It was somebody that he had seen before, in a flitting glance that way, not fixed long enough to set his identity certainly in the mind. He struggled to recall where he had seen the man, and under what circumstances. It came to him at last out of the whirl and tangle of that terrible night. The man was Dell Lucas, Lije Silverstone's timber cruiser, the one who had met Branson on Big Creek. The fellow lay stretched near the tunnel mouth, his face turned to the ground, his arms wrapped about his head in the manner of a shield against the fiery air. Cameron felt that he would not make any attempt to escape before day. If they two only should come through the night alive, Cameron determined that bonds should go back on the scoundrel's arms.

Nim Smith stretched there beside the man in whose capture and delivery he had spent his last strength. Whether he was alive or dead, Cameron could not tell. In any case he could do no more to help him than he had done. He had tied a wet handkerchief over Smith's face to filter out in some degree the smoke and temper the burning air to his skin and lungs. That was all he could do. The blanket over the opening called for his constant attention to smother its innumerable fires.

That thin curtain was the wall between life and death. If it burned or fell while the fire was billowing its vast clouds of hot smoke, all would perish speedily. The tunnel would pack with smoke until no man could live in it. All would be driven out from a death by hot suffocation to a death more merciful in the flames. As fast as one blanket dried and became hopelessly inflammable, Cameron hung a fresh one behind it, thus covering the opening, all save one small corner that he could not reach.

At his post there the ranger watched the slow night hours creep their searing trail. Many of the men had gone mad from their suffering; the cave was an infernal place of incoherent talk, shrieks for water, wild, piteous appeals. Cameron suffered with the rest of them, breathing through the handkerchief bound about his nose and mouth. On this smoke mask he had expended the water that he apportioned as his share out of his well-nigh empty canteen. He realized that he must live to bring any of them out again to the fresh, sweet air when that riot of fire was done.

Several times they had pressed behind him, demanding to be allowed to go, to take their chances in the open rather than stifle in the cave. Persuasion-earnest advice, a glimpse of the red world outside, had sufficed as yet to hold them in check. He dreaded the moment when they would come, deaf

to reason, and fight him for the passage to a certain and fearful death.

While he crouched, his face pressed for momentary relief from the blistering draft against the wall of the tunnel, the expected moment came. A man far back in the cave, where it was totally dark, shouted suddenly:

"I'll not stay here and die! I'm goin' out of here! Come on with me, men!"

Cameron heard them scrambling to their feet, choking, gasping, as they rose into the denser smoke. They came crowding forward, trampling the unconscious underfoot with neither pity nor concern. Cameron shifted into the light that fell in through the uncovered rift, and stood with his back to the wall, revolver in his hand.

"I'll shoot the first man that touches that blanket!" he said.

They stopped, wasting precious breath and strength in curses and pleas. None tried to pass. Outside there waited a death that, in their desperation of pain, some believed they could escape; at the door stood death, certain and inescapable. The ranger's voice left no question in the densest mind of that.

"Lie down; save your strength," Cameron advised. "In two hours the worst of it will be over. It will begin to cool off a little and we can let in some air. You've got a good chance for life here; there's not a man of you would get ten rods from the door if I let you go."

They were obdurate. They argued, pleaded distractedly, threatened him. On the ground they groveled in their misery, begging him with sobs for which there were no tears left in their burning eyes to let them leave and take their chances with it. Moved by their pleas, Cameron took down a corner of the last blanket that he had left to hang between them and the red oven outside.

That look was enough. The world had been turned into a roaring furnace. Where the forest had stood when they took refuge there, all was as empty as a mown field. A tangle of giant tree trunks lay heaped before the tunnel, burning with the heat of solid wood. Moaning, hope dead in them, they sank down again to the floor of their hot, smoky refuge to wait the end.

Cameron adjusted the blanket again, not moved so much by their sudden submission as by what had been discovered to his sight when the glow from the outside had lighted the tunnel those few seconds. Over against the wall he had seen Branson. The light had fallen for a moment full on his face before he shifted down into the shadow.

Branson's presence there was a shock to him which dulled for a while his physical suffering. Cameron doubted whether the man was there even for the honest purpose of saving his life, his distrust of him had grown so great since the night that they had met last in the street of Waverley. No doubt he had slipped in among them as they were pushing through the woods in smoke and flame toward the tunnel. But how came Branson in the woods? What was his business there?

Dell Lucas seemed to be the answer —Dell Lucas, whom Smith had said, with his last word, he had caught setting the forest afire. But, base as he believed Branson to be at heart, Cameron could not believe him so base as that. No; the man could not be guilty of complicity in that unmatched crime, whatever blackness there might be in his gloomy soul. Perhaps Branson had been caught in the fire, going or coming on some business of his own, and had taken shelter in the tunnel ahead of them. As much as he owed Branson, and as desirous as he was to stand out in the open with him, man to man, and pay it, he could not believe him inhuman enough to connive at the destruction of the forest.

But Branson had slunk down when the light hit him, unwilling to be seen. That did not speak of an honest purpose. Treachery might that moment be moving his hand against Cameron in the dark. He would bear watching; he must be watched. Cameron got out his match case, determined to settle any doubt of identity. If it was Branson, and not a trick of the uncertain light—although he knew his eyes had not been

deceived—he would stand ready to meet him at the first move.

The faint gurgle of water flowing from a canteen sounded above the momentary lull in the discord of pain.

"Gad! Somebody's got water!" said a choking voice.

Cameron struck a match. Branson was drinking, his head thrown back, lavish with the water in his canteen. On the ground beside him Dell Lucas had lifted himself to his elbow. The look of incredulity, wild longing, in his bursting, glittering eyes told that it was he who had spoken. At the glare of the match Lucas reached with the quickness of a serpent and snatched the canteen from Branson's hand.

For a moment Lucas sat as if transfixed by the recognition of Branson. The surprise, the wild flood of anger and hate that rushed into his dark face, outweighed for a second the pang of thirst. He lifted the canteen to drink.

The clamor in the tunnel rose again at the word "water." Hoarse, cracked cries—piping, shrill cries—from the red, parched throats of men no longer men. Beasts they were, savage and selfish, snatching, struggling, panting, sobbing; calling for water, water! Here this one had it—down him, tear it out of his hand, put the precious balm of it to those seared, cracked lips, let it drool down the hissing gullet! Water, water! It was a delirium of water.

Cameron shouted to them, quieted them at length. They sank back, moaning, their faces pressed to the ground. While he moved among them, trying to give them hope enough to live on until the break of day, the blanket at the tunnel mouth caught fire and hissed away in flame. It was the last one. There was nothing more that Cameron could do to shield them even a little from the heat.

This grew in intensity. Hot smoke drove back into the tunnel, making all the suffering that had gone before seem but the shadow of torture. Time and again they rushed the ranger in their mad determination to break out; time and again he drove them back with what seemed a cruelty beyond the heart of any man. But it was the greatest and the only kindness he could do for them in that fire-flooded world which seemed void of even one little human breath of air.

They wore themselves out against the rock of his strength at last. When day broke it discovered them all prone on their faces, sucking from the ground the little air that kept them half alive. Cameron's hands were severely burned; his lungs were stinging; there was not a drop of moisture in him. He felt that the blood had been evaporated out of his veins and left low, to run thickly, burning like creosote as it coursed its channels. Smoke had been blown into him, burned into him, sucked with every breath for hours.

In his long watch at the door he had suffered and borne more than those who owed their lives to him. But he was more a man than any of them. The forest had trained him for this supreme test of his endurance in the day that it was to bow down and perish from the earth.

Yet his condition was better than that of many of those who had been spared by his unselfish devotion to his trust. Some of them, he knew, must have given over the struggle hours past, for they lay still and stiff around him where he stood, the first faint light of dawn breaking a little circle through the smoke and darkness at the tunnel mouth.

"Men, I'm going to bring you water," he announced. "Give me your canteens."

He weighted himself with as many as he believed he could bring back full, extracted from the men a solemn promise that none would attempt to leave the tunnel unless he failed to return within an hour. The hope of water held them, for none knew where to turn to find it in the coals and embers, burning logs, burning stumps, of the destroyed forest —Branson, and perhaps Lucas, alone excepted.

Branson did not speak. He was lying on his face, close to the wall. Cameron could pick him out in the dull,

dim-breaking light, but he could not tell whether he was dead or alive.

There was a little creek not more than a quarter of a mile away. Cameron waded through fire to reach it, his way doubled by the detours he was forced to make to pass barriers of burning trees. The destruction of the forest seemed to be complete. It was a red bed of coals, a heap of blazing trunks. The heat of it was the heat of a kiln, but duty carried him through it where a weaker man would have faltered in bewilderment, and gone mad with the suffering.

The creek was choked with burning trees. Blazing trunks had fallen into its little pools, hot stones had rolled down the mountain into them, raising the temperature of the water in places until fish were cooked. These floated now in testimony that death had come even to places which an inexperienced man would have counted as the most secure.

Cameron soaked his dry skin as he filled the canteens, and started back refreshed. The torture of coming was increased by the slow labor of his return. It was the supreme trial of a man. He came through it, carrying enough water to relieve for a little while the racking thirst of those who waited him in their delirium of pain.

Eleven men had died during that wild night. Nimrod Smith was still alive, but unconscious. When Cameron poured water down his throat he revived enough to rave.

Dell Lucas was among the dead. Cameron was surprised by this discovery, for Lucas had seemed one of the strongest. But there he lay on his back, his face turned to the light. His features were distorted, his face as black as if he had been hanged. Cameron bent to look at him closer, pulled the garment away from his throat. The mark of fingers was pressed into the dead man's flesh where a strong hand had throttled him.

Lucas had been choked to death.

Cameron recalled the look that had come into the man's face that moment when the match discovered Branson to him. In Branson's face the expression had been inscrutable; in the other's there was mingled fear and hate. Quickly the ranger looked about the tunnel for Branson. He called him by name, struck matches to light up the farthest point.

Branson was gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

Nature wept for the destroyed forest that morning. The torrential rain came like an eager host that reaches the battlefield too late, and poured its cooling balm over the dead, cooked earth.

When it began to fall, life sprang up like a wilted plant in the long-suffering men grouped at the tunnel mouth. They went out and stood in it, stretching burned hands, upturning burned faces for the consolation of its blessing. The gray, shaggy bear that had shared the cave with them through the night came shuffling to the door at the sound of the rain. Unafraid it stood, its sharp nose lifted, snuffling the scent of the rain, turning its head as if to hear that the world was safe again for it to venture forth. It passed out between the lines the men opened for it, looking neither to the right nor the left, but straight ahead, as if stunned by the ruination that it faced.

Driven from its feast, the fire left only the black bones of the ancient forest. These great trunks, partly burned, were strewn so thick that a man could have walked over them for miles without setting foot upon the ground.

On a litter made of the men's jackets Nimrod Smith was carried to a hospital in Waverley. In spite of the sufferings which they had borne, all the rest who had lived through the night with Cameron were able to walk.

More than half of Waverley had been destroyed. Its hospitals were filled with the burned and injured who had come pouring out of the mountains ahead of and with the fire. Refugees camped in the streets. Cameron was told on his arrival that more than two hundred people on the scattered ranches

and far-lying homesteads were known to have been lost.

After disposing of Smith as comfortably as his sad condition would allow, Cameron left him to the physicians and nurses, one of scores upon whom that wild fire had set its brand for all their days, and went to seek Montgomery. He was anxious to learn what word had come from the large forces of men under the other rangers. Montgomery was in hospital, he was informed by a policeman, as he stood before the bare foundation of the building where the supervisor's office had been.

They would not allow Montgomery to talk, for fear of a hemorrhage. He had been stabbed in the lung; his case was most serious; but, barring infection, the doctor believed that he would live. Cameron's soul was troubled. He had desired the advice of his superior in the matter of Branson. But the supervisor was out of it; whatever was to be done was up to him.

Cameron had turned this thing over in his mind on the way down out of the mountains. Branson had murdered Dell Lucas. And Lucas had been one of the men who scattered the fire in the woods. Could it be possible that Branson was the other? Cameron was convinced that it was so. From no other motive but that of destroying evidence of his own guilt, he had taken his hireling's life.

Branson had known of Smith's capture of Lucas. He had followed them, bent on a rescue—in which case, if he had succeeded, poor old Nim Smith would have been the victim of his hand. Failing in his design, he had mingled with the fugitives, as any stranger might have done unknown, with the sole intention of stifling the tongue that might turn against him for its own immunity.

Branson must pay the penalty of his several crimes. The supervisor could not lend his counsel in the matter now. Cameron took it into his own hand with solemn determination. Branson should stand to answer. His first business would be to find him, arrest him, and hand him over to the Federal courts.

Doubtless Branson had come to Waverley. It was the one refuge in that devastated country where a man might find the necessities of life. Branson would have come down boldly, believing that he was safe. No man in the tunnel had recognized him, or would have known him, for that matter, in the broad of day. None had seen him leave. Cameron had questioned them on that point. Branson had left with the mysterious craft of which he was master, and it would be impossible to prove that he had been in the tunnel at all. It would be one man's word against another; nothing more.

Cameron considered all this. It did not alter his determination to arrest Branson on sight. There was no personal consideration this time. Once he had given Branson his life because he had promised Joan Drummond that he would not lift his hand against him. On that occasion he had felt that his honor could stand a strain better than her heart. Here was a greater claim than his own of a personal affront and grave injury; greater than her claim of affection and desire of selfish protection. It was the claim of public justice, and Branson must pay.

Perhaps when the story of Branson's crimes became known she might turn against him; perhaps not. It was a woman's way to stand for the innocence of the man she loved against the accusations and evidence of the world.

It was drawing near the close of day. The clouds had broken, the sun was shining with that impression of newness about it such as one is conscious of after the stress of disturbed weather and obscured skies. Cameron had the look of a man who had stood with his elbow in the ribs of death. He was gaunt of face, solemn, stern. It seemed that all the vanity of life had been burned out of him, and the dross drawn away. His garments were singed; holes were burned in his hat; the tops of his heavy socks, drawn up over his trouser legs, were so scorched that he had to enforce their holding power with strings.

He was not a figure for a drawing-

room, nor even the street of a place showing more of the refinements and niceties of life than that of Waverley. But there he fitted without discord and passed unnoticed. There were too many in that place who had their griefs and losses to turn from their own somber problems to satisfy the curious eye.

As he stood debating which way to turn in his search for Branson, not knowing where the man would have his headquarters in the crowded and broken town, Cameron saw a picture down the street that made his heart leap like a trout. Joan Drummond was approaching from toward the bank, her senator father at her side. Through the wreckage and ruin of the street she walked, as bright as a morning-glory, a gay little bonnet riding her abundant hair with the piquant carelessness of a leaf that had come straying down from the bough.

His bandaged hand went to his hat; he felt the blood in his cheeks almost as hot as the fire that lately had scorched his face.

"Why, it's Mr. Cameron!" she said, hurrying her father forward to meet him. The senator's face was lively with a friendly light.

"I've wanted to meet you, Mr. Cameron," he said, with warmth and sincerity surprising to the ranger, who could not frame any cause.

In his word-sparing way Cameron acknowledged the pleasure and the honor, wondering if all that friendliness would not fly away if Branson should appear. For even her presence would not spare Branson the humiliation of immediate arrest.

"We were talking about you just a little while ago," she said. "We wondered if you were safe."

Cameron told them briefly of the refuge that he had found in the woods, and something in a few words of what his men had suffered there. Joan groaned her pity when he spoke of the men who had died in the tunnel. Senator Drummond shook his head with a weight of sadness over him that seemed to crush his strong frame and make him old.

"A great many people lost their lives in this disaster," he said. "I feel guilty of complicity in it, Cameron. It is a thing that will pursue me to my grave."

Joan touched his arm soothingly, and looked at Cameron with such a face of pain that he was almost moved to compassion for the senator's suffering, deserved as he knew it to be.

"You shouldn't think of it that way, father," she said, her eyes imploring Cameron to add his word to ease the senator's remorse.

Cameron knew too well that every pang Drummond suffered had been in keeping for him through the years against this day when regrets would not avail. His mind was too full of the stern matters of life, the awful recollections of besieging death, to allow one empty or insincere phrase. He gave her what sympathy he could with his eyes, but his lips remained dumb.

"I might have let Montgomery have his telephone line—it wasn't so much that he asked. He was right about it; I was wrong. I might have stood out of his way."

The senator walked apart from them a little, to better struggle with the accusations of his soul. He stood looking up the bleak mountainside, where the green shore of the forest lately had been, and over the valley filled with the wreckage of ruined homes. Seldom before in man's experience had such argument been spread at his feet to convict him of his own mistakes. One hour of reason in the past would have outweighed a thousand years of his present regret.

Senator Drummond was conscious of that. As he stood there, oblivious to all about him save the ruin and suffering that his obduracy had helped to bring upon that land, tears ran down his face.

"You've heard about Mr. Montgomery?" she asked.

"I've been to see him, but they wouldn't let him talk. They said he was stabbed in a riot; the particulars I do not know."

"He was fighting for me!" she said, benediction in her voice.

"God bless him!" said the ranger. The news surprised the exclamation out of him. It was in keeping with Montgomery's character to make a fight like that.

"He's a man in a thousand men!" said the senator, leaving his brooding sorrow to take up the new theme. He told Cameron how the tragedy had fallen on the supervisor. Cameron heard it with no comment, only nodding his solemn head slowly at times, his eyes fixed on some distant object, his lips as hard as a mouth of stone.

"He'll get well," she said, great faith in her pure eyes. "I pray for him with every breath."

Cameron looked into her face, a calm joy softening his own. "He will recover, then," he said.

Senator Drummond looked at the burned, grim ranger as he spoke, an expression in his face such as comes when a man sees or hears something that his mind but glimpses an understanding of. He turned to his daughter, who stood before the man of the woods, her head bent, as if she had heard a blessing. Then back again his eyes were drawn to that stern, silent man whose heart he had seen for one quick throb. The senator drew a great breath, turned apart from them a little way again, and stood looking over the ruins of the town.

"I saw Nim Smith a few days before the fire, Mr. Cameron. He told me he was just starting to visit you at Timberline. I wondered if he got through."

"He didn't get through; he's here in a hospital now."

"You say Smith was caught in the fire?" Senator Drummond rejoined them as he spoke.

"As we were breaking camp to strike for the tunnel, Smith came to us, driving a man ahead of him. He had caught the fellow and tied his arms. With his last conscious word Smith said he had seen the man setting the woods afire."

"Caught him setting fire to the woods! Why, Cameron, you don't believe it—you don't think it was incendiary?"

"Beyond a doubt."

"Where is the scoundrel? Have you turned him over to the authorities?"

"He is dead; he was murdered by his partner in the crime. The fellow joined us unknown to us on our march to the tunnel, found Lucas there, and choked him to death."

"Lucas! Not Dell Lucas?"

"They called him Dell."

"I knew him. He would have done it; he was a rascal from his first breath."

"And with his last, senator. I found him dead at daylight this morning, the print of fingers on his throat. The man that killed him was gone."

"Who was that man? Did you know him?"

"I had a glimpse of his face in the light of a match. I'm looking for him now."

There was something in Cameron's voice when he said the last words that made Joan's hair creep. Her face grew white, her eyes big. It was as if the ranger had pronounced the sentence of death upon that man.

Senator Drummond was as pale as if the last drop of blood had been drained from his heart. The breath seemed to die out of him; a glaze to film his eyes. He looked like a man lifted up from his cooling board to stand there in the bright light of day.

For another, a more horrible, accusation had flashed into his mind. He recalled the conference between himself and Silverstone, at which he had dismissed the impatient lumberman with the advice to put Branson on the work of making evidence against Montgomery on which to found charges for his removal. He knew as well as he was cognizant of the sun above the western hill that Cameron, from some delicate reason of his own, had spared them the mention of Branson's name; he knew as well as he was aware that his heart felt as if his blood was lead that Branson was the man.

Guilty as he felt himself to be, the senator's rage against Branson was so great that it shook him like a tree in the wind. For he had not connived at any such cowardly, cruel, and unthink-

ing thing as the burning of the forest to manufacture evidence of the supervisor's unfitness. At the most, the great desire of Silverstone to have Montgomery ousted had been to the senator only a small incidental of his day's troubles. Some little thing he expected them to bring forward in time, some trivial matter that would serve as a makeshift to hang his charges on. But not this awful outrage, not this scourge set loose to gnaw the very bones of the world!

The senator lifted his hand as if to take an oath; his voice trembled in his throat, came in a strange sound from his lips.

"May the Almighty strengthen your arm when you throw your gun down on that man!" he said.

CHAPTER XV.

Cameron had no thought, as he parted from the senator and his daughter, that Drummond even suspected Branson. For Joan's sake he had spared the mention of Branson's name, just as he had spared, on that other occasion, Branson's life.

A good deal had been sacrificed, one way and another, that she might have Branson, he reflected. And it might be now that the courts would set the fellow free of this charge, sparing him again for her. As he looked at it from that distance, cooler in his judgment, it seemed very doubtful whether a case could be made to hold against Branson. There were a hundred tangles which could be put into the law to snare the feet of justice.

But he remained set in his determination to arrest Branson. By virtue of his office he had power to make arrests in such cases. The one big hope in the situation now was that Branson would question his authority and resist. Then he could adjust not alone his own pressing claim against Branson, but that of society as well.

He inquired at the hotel; Branson had not been there. He did not know where to turn to seek him in that disordered town. The only thing he could do was to wait for Waverley to deliver him when its night tide began to flow.

The sun was down, the valley full of a rosy glow that recalled to Cameron the last hour that he had spent at Timberline, when the cold foreboding rose up out of the dark gorge and fell across his heart. He sought a restaurant to regale himself, to rest a bit, and think over his plans for the night.

The Gray Goose was still standing, for it was in the favored zone over which the protection of the fire department had reached. The front had suffered in the raid the mob had made on it, the door was down, the plate-glass windows broken, the interior open to the sight of all who passed the street. It suited Cameron very well as it was. From a table near the front he could watch for Branson.

He did not believe that Branson had perished in the fire. Hot as the forest was when Branson had left the tunnel, Cameron knew that he had lived to pass through it in safety. The man was crafty and resourceful. He had come directly to Waverley, and he was there at that moment. Joan had not mentioned him, nor inquired about him. It was likely that she had not seen him since his return.

At this thought Cameron rose abruptly from his unfinished meal. He paid his check and hurried again into the street. He felt certain now that Branson had not seen her yet. He must not be permitted to see her, to stand in her pure presence, to touch her hand with the fingers which had kindled that woeful fire, fingers foul with the murder of a helpless, even though guilty, man. That sacrilege must be prevented, even if he had to challenge Branson at her door.

In a little while Branson would come from his concealment in his fine feathers and march off to the senator's house. The one place to make certain of him was in the street turning into the Park. His feet were on the way thither before his mind had finished the thought. Less than a square from the restaurant door, he met Branson, dressed not in his fine raiment, but in his coarse ranger out-

fit; headed not toward Senator Drummond's house, but in the opposite direction.

Cameron stopped while ten yards lay between them, and waited for Branson to come. Branson wore his hat pulled over his eyes, and walked with his head bent, with slow and moody step. He did not see Cameron until the ranger challenged him with:

"Ho, Branson!"

Branson stopped with a jerk, like a man catching himself from falling in a dream. For only a flash this startled state was apparent; then he walked on, ignoring Cameron as he would a post by the wayside. Cameron was not stirred to any fresh heat by this affront. It was only one more straw in the big load that he was carrying already on Branson's account. The ranger stepped out quickly and laid his hand on Branson's shoulder, wrenched him round until he faced him.

"You're under arrest, Branson," he said.

"On what charge, and by whose authority?"

"It isn't necessary to specify the charge here, and I don't believe you'll question the authority."

"If you want me arrested, go and get a warrant, and a regularly commissioned officer of the law to serve it!" Branson was highly contemptuous. He started on his way.

Cameron didn't want to draw his revolver to enforce his authority or to administer the punishment for old insults for which he prayed Branson's defiance would give him the moral justification. But he kept his hand close to his weapon, remembering Branson's speed, and as Branson fell back with that quick preliminary step he slung it from the leather.

"I'm not armed," said Branson loftily.

"All right, then; we're equal." With the words Cameron tossed the revolver to the ground. His act was so expressive of what he expected Branson to do that a blind man could have felt it. It was a challenge to stand up and fight, man to man.

Few of the street lights had been repaired; the town was largely in darkness yet. Beyond them, in front of the café, a light was on, but where they met it was already growing dusk. But it was light enough yet for Cameron to see the exultant change that swept over Branson's face as his pistol rattled to the pavement. It scarcely had fallen before Cameron was almost smelling the muzzle of a short-barreled automatic that Branson had produced with such ease that he might have plucked it out of the air.

The few who had stopped to see what was between the two men fell back in haste, some of them jerking quick words of warning to Cameron.

Cameron did not feel that he had thrown away his advantage. On the other hand, it had brought him the chance that would not have presented if he had held the drop on Branson and marched him off to the police. It gave him the opening for which he longed, the excuse for which he had prayed. He could have killed Branson with every legal justification when he made that movement to draw his gun, but he did not want Branson to go that way. He wanted him to go in a prolonged way, in a struggle that would burst his black heart for the hopelessness of it, that would start his eyeballs from his head in the despairing, blank, hot agony of death. Exalted to the heights of sublime defiance, he struck Branson in the face.

Cameron felt the hot spurt of flame in his face as Branson fired, but he was not conscious of the sound of the shot. Perhaps he was hit; he did not know. He was as insensible to pain in his high rage as a heap of earth.

Now he had Branson by the wrist, the muzzle of the weapon pointed downward. Branson's finger on the delicate trigger fired the weapon several times so fast that count was lost. They struggled in swift-shifting clasps across the walk, out into the street, a crowd growing around them like the pent waters of a stream. Cameron fought him then only to establish their equality, to take away the mechanical

advantage that his enemy possessed. His head was filled with a roaring; fire seemed to stand before his eyes.

The revolver was empty now; Branson was trying to strike him with it. Cameron released his arm and fell back to striking distance. It was a joy to fight him so, hand to hand, in the very street, before the very people where Branson had humiliated him. Branson flung the revolver in the ranger's face and closed with him in a crushing embrace.

It was a joy to fight him so, hand to hand, no mechanical advantage with one or the other, with what prowess and strength that nature had given them—foot to foot, breast to breast. This was Branson's flesh that he tore with his hands, Branson's blood that he felt spray his face when he struck; this was Branson's foul body that he was dragging down to hell, weighted with the deaths of unnumbered innocents who had perished in that deluge of fire! It was Branson gasping there in his arms—Branson, fighting like a man engulfed by the sea. It was Branson whose spine snapped as he bent him like a sapling—Branson, whose life he had spared once, whose life he would not spare this hour!

They fought the width of the street, cluttered with the débris of fallen chimneys and foundations. Branson was out of his reach for a moment here. Now he came up again, a half-burned scantling clubbed to strike. In the strength of Cameron's sublime savagery the weapon was only a straw. He wrenched it from Branson's hands, sending him reeling as his hold broke.

Branson was among the wreckage of a toppled chimney, hurling bricks and stones. If any struck Cameron, they were to him only feathers' weight. For a little while he let Branson carry the fight in this unequal way, as the last indulgence granted a man doomed; then he rushed in on him again.

Close-locked they struggled now, swaying across the street, now to this curb, now to that; feet planted hard, muscles strained until they started the skin, bones cracking, blood in their mouths; struggled and swayed, panted, groaned, muttered strangled curses; struggled and fought, raining blood, until Branson lay at his feet, a broken, quivering, silent thing.

Cameron bent over him. He was breathing with a sound of blood in his throat.

"Branson, you're under arrest," he said, to impress the understanding in the other's mind that he was whipped, and to lodge that understanding with him to carry out of the world if he must go. "Get up and come with me!"

Branson struggled as if to obey, lifting himself to one elbow, where he rested.

"Here's your hat, mister," said a boy behind Cameron. The ranger turned to take it. A murmur like a gasp swept the crowd, a shot sounded close beside him. There, when he faced about in a flash to see, stood Lije Silverstone, a revolver in his hand, Branson stretched out on the pavement, his face to the sky.

"He'd 'a' shot you," said Silverstone; "he was reachin' for that gun."

The lumberman pointed to Cameron's revolver. It was lying in the street fully six feet from Branson's hand.

Cameron knew that Branson had not reached for the gun; he knew it as well as if he had been watching him all the time. But Silverstone had seized that pretense as a justification to still Branson's tongue forever. He had watched the fight, and the outcome of it; had seen Branson placed under arrest, injured to the point of death. Fearing that the man would hesitate to march out on the long journey burdened with his sins, Silverstone had manufactured this excuse to quiet him.

As the intermediary hireling had struck down the lowest in that diabolical compact, so the highest of them had stricken him. Silverstone now stood a hero in the eyes of all who had seen his quick work. Scores of them were ready to swear that his well-directed shot had saved the ranger's life.

Cameron picked up his revolver and turned away without a word. The anger was dead in him now, and he was

cold and sick. The crowd opened to let him pass. The world was confusion before his eyes, his soul was heavy in him from the sight of Branson stretched there dead in the street. He shuddered now, the insanity of his passion gone, to think how near his own hand had come to the responsibility for this deed. Humbly he gave up a prayer of thankfulness that Branson's death, deserving of it as he had been, rested on other hands than his.

CHAPTER XVI.

The newspaper made much of Lije Silverstone's part in the tragedy that had cost Edgar Branson his life. But for his timely subvention, the ranger who was attempting to arrest Branson on the charge of having set fire to the national forest would have been slain. So said the paper, using the occasion as excuse for printing again the long and laudatory article that it kept standing, with a picture of Silverstone, on the lumberman's rise and progression from poverty to wealth.

Cameron was only a small and incidental actor in the affair, according to the newspaper recital. Fate had put him in the cast for the plain purpose of creating this opportunity for the eminent Silverstone. The paper did not say this in plain words, but it was implied in every paragraph. This pleased the ranger better than greater publicity would have done. While he had no regret for the punishment that he had administered to Branson, time only deepened the feeling of thankfulness that his responsibility went no farther.

The coroner did not hold any official action necessary. Whether the ranger had been right or wrong in his charges, Branson had resisted arrest and had displayed arms in so doing. No friend stood forward in Branson's behalf; the case closed like an incident of the day, and was all but forgotten in twenty-four hours amid the activity of raising a new town on the ruins of the old.

Cameron was surprised that he had come through the encounter without any serious injury. Branson's point-blank shot had missed him, and his blows had done little damage. The ranger's face was bruised where the thrown revolver had struck him, and his burned hands continued swollen and painful two days after the fight. The doctor at the hospital where Nim Smith lay scolded him roundly for fighting with his hands in such condition. Next time, he advised, put it off for a week or so, or use a gun like a gentleman.

Otherwise, Cameron had come through his trial by fire like a granite rock. He seemed indeed the superman that Joan Drummond had imagined him, but he knew that it was only the proof that he was rehabilitated and ready again to take up his place in the din and activities of the world. For him life was finished in that place; the rough, romantic chapter of that story was at its end. The world that had been sufficient for him once was not big enough now. His vision had expanded, as if the fire had cleared around him the barriers which had trammeled his soul.

A man who had a fight in him must go where the contest was hottest, and reach up after the great, rich trophies of life. He knew now that there was a fight in every drop of his pine-cleansed blood. A man must go—a man must go to his kind, and mingle in their vast labors, sing in the joy of their vast achievements. A man must go, but it was bitter to go alone.

But what was the use? He might have kept on sighing forever. So he gave it up. But regrets he could not put down, even though he could smother their voice in his heart. He lamented that he had met Branson, that he had fallen to such a level of savagery and fought him there in the street. He didn't care for the laudatory verdict of the world; he only wondered what Joan thought of it. And Joan he had not seen since that brief meeting on the street two days ago.

He fell into a reverie, standing there watching the activities of the town, mottled with bright spots of new lumber as if it had begun to break out with some disease. He was growing restless in his

new strength, doubly restless in his new longing. The winter would be down upon them soon; Joan would be going away beyond his world. Perhaps she would come no more to that sad place. Even if she came, he would not be there to welcome her, even silently, at his far distance.

He could not go until his friends were on their feet. Montgomery was improving; Smith had regained his senses and was taking on strength. He would be able to talk for a little while that afternoon, the nurse informed him.

Cameron turned toward the hospital at the appointed hour, thinking still of Joan. In his mind Nim Smith was an object indirect, dim and water-lined and far off. Joan filled the nearer world.

What was Joan's opinion of him by now? As much as he longed for a look into her eyes, a fleeting glance of her as she passed, he was afraid that he would meet her. Perhaps she believed in Branson and was mourning his death. He feared that if he met her she would pass him as a thing abhorred.

It was a changed Nimrod Smith that he saw propped up in the hospital bed, ready against his coming. The fire had shorn him in the beginning, and what stubble of hair it had left had been cut away. He was as bald as a buzzard, and not unlike one in appearance. His misfortune had only aggravated his solemn aspect, in spite of the loss of his mustache, which was cut to outstanding bristles as coarse as shoe pegs.

Smith smiled like an old cat showing its teeth, lifting his upper lip without a sign of mirth. It was an independent movement from the other appurtenances to laughter, all of which auxiliaries seemed dead or disabled—a fat-looking movement, owing to the puffed state of the poor fellow's face.

There was a glitter of excitement in his eyes, which had come through the fire unimpaired, for a woodsman's first and last thought in such an adventure is of his eyes. He had no hand to offer Cameron, each of them being bound in cotton and bandages until they looked as if he had been making ready to enter the ring. After preliminary greetings which Smith cut short, he beckoned with his head for Cameron to come nearer.

"Get Branson," he whispered. "Dell Lucas told me Branson was the man that hired him."

The nurse, seeing that there were secrets between them, left the two alone. Cameron explained how Branson had paid for his share in the evil plot, after taking his hireling's life.

"How did you catch that scoundrel, Nim?"

"Well, sir, I'd been livin' on a burned bear for three or four days, figgerin' around the edge of that fire to see if I could git my lines laid straight and git out of that country. It was as smoky as all nations up there, and I was plumb nutty for a day or two."

The beginning of his adventure appeared to have been erased from Nimrod's mind by the trying experiences of what followed. He made no reference to his mission in the woods, or where or how the fire came to catch him, but plunged into the middle of the tale, just as he used to snatch a stanza out of the middle of a song. Cameron knew enough to account for his presence in the woods, and let him tell it in his own way.

"Well, sir, that fire hadn't crossed Settler Crick then, and I was right at home when I come out to it. I started to foller the crick on down to the settlements, and that's when I run into that feller Dell Lucas settin' fire on the other side. I don't know if I ever told you, but I had a crow to pick with that feller, and him and me——"

"I remember; you told me."

"I thought I did, but I wasn't sure. I was goin' to put a knife in that feller one time up on the St. Jo over a girl. So when I seen him settin' them woods afire I stepped out from behind a tree and slung my old gun down on him and took him along. I didn't take no chances with that feller. He offered me a hundred dollars, and raised it to two, if I'd let him go and help him swear it all off on to Branson."

Nimrod paused, looked down at the sheet in thoughtful way for a while.

Cameron did not hurry him, for he knew that Smith was assorting out of his tangle of experiences the straight road of his tale. There must have been many overwhelming events, the obtruding recollection of which he had to skirt now like interposing mountains.

"We had the devil's own time of it them three or four days—I disremember now just how long it was. The fire that feller started whipped round and penned us. We follered the crick. I knowed you'd be countin' on Settler Crick to hold it on that side, and you'd be on the Waverley side with a gang. My aim was to break through to you before that feller died on my hands. I nussed that man along like a baby to keep him goin'."

Smith stopped again, his thoughts wandering off in the maze of his frightful and undetermined days.

"Yes, sir, I'd 'a' brung that feller through," he said, drawing his breath with a hiss through his clenched teeth, "I'd 'a' brung him through if it'd 'a' cost me my life! Well, I *did* lose m' 'cordion."

Cameron praised him for his persistence and courage. Smith discounted it modestly.

"I'm sorry Branson choked that feller," he said. "I was savin' him up for hangin'."

"It must have been about as bad as hanging, Nim."

"Yes, I reckon it was; but other folks didn't git no fun out of it like they do a hangin'. Well, sir, I stached that old 'cordion away under a ledge up there, and I'm goin' back as soon as I'm able to wiggle and see if I can't find it."

"You couldn't find it, even if it wasn't burned; you'd have nothing to go by but the hills, and they don't look the same. The trees are all flat, Nim—as flat as cornstalks in a dragged field. You'd better not talk any more now; rest a while."

Smith nodded, turned his head to look out of the window. The smoke was washed out of the sky; the world was made over, glad and new. Cameron thought that nature, which had created that vast forest without pride, had destroyed it without regret. There was no mourning in the calm blue for the woeful ruin that lay back on the mountainsides.

Cameron felt that the fire had taken something out of his life, for a void and a melancholy sense of loss was around him and with him continually. But that building in strength on the ruins of the town brought him new reflections. It was better for a man, downed by the storm of adversity, to get to his feet with the next breath and begin to clear away the débris for his new foundations. If he lay prone in the hope of gathering strength to lift him beyond his perilous situation, the after flood would sweep him away forever. His day was at hand, his hour.

Perhaps a man should not have his heart's desire ever in this life, so that he would continue striving to the end. It seemed, on looking back, that a golden chance had fallen in his way, which he had broken and cast aside. If he had delivered Branson to the law in his guilt and shame, Joan would have turned against him. Time would have cured the sickness of her heart. He might have come into it when the dark shadow of Branson had worn away.

It was just as well that the woods were gone, he thought. What a savage they had made of him! But for the fire, they might have held him captive to their gloomy charms for years. Now there would be no upbraiding of loyalty, no back straining like the call of home. Out of the ruin he had leaped up into the light.

And Joan—what would she be doing that hour? What thoughts would be moving in her breast? No matter. The thought of him would not enter into that white sanctuary except with a shudder, like poison in her veins.

There was no reason for him to continue lingering in Waverley. He would pack his traps and leave that night, for he could not seek Joan and attempt an explanation, he could not bear the thought of meeting her face to face and feeling the shocked accusation of her eyes. He was a savage; he was an out-

cast. The woods had robbed him of his right to inherit with other men.

And Joan—Joan stood in the door.

Cameron felt his blood tingle as it seemed to sweep from heart to brain, from brain to extremities, and fail in its strength, all in one short breath. Joan was in the door, her hand on the latch, her foot on the threshold, pausing questioningly. There was no grief in her fair, sweet face; no sorrow in her eyes. Her lips were open as if she had stood listening, and now came stealthily to break upon them in surprise.

Cameron rose hastily, changing from hot to cold, cold to hot, like a man in the first stage of a racking ague. Nim Smith reached up a bandaged hand.

"I know what it is now, Dan; I was tryin' to think it up," he said. *"Joan wants you to come and see her!"*

Cameron did not understand. No man is a hero when he is afraid of a woman'e eyes, nor very gallant when earnestly sincere. He stood looking at Joan, waiting for the blast of hate and scorn that would drive him like a derelict out of her sight forever.

Joan was all in white. Her broad, plain hat was in her hand; her fair hair was loose on her temples where the wind had lifted it and drawn it down in the fervor of its kiss. And there was no more hate in her eyes than in the eyes of doves, and no reproach. She laughed and came in and closed the door.

"Oh, you slow messenger!" she said, shaking a finger in sweet censure at honest old Nimrod Smith, who chuckled as he sank back in contentment against his pillow. And then to Cameron: "I've been waiting and wondering why you didn't come!"

WHY HE REMINDED HIM OF DANIEL WEBSTER

SEEING an opportunity to reap a golden harvest, with so many of the younger men in the service of Uncle Sam, and Washington crowded to its utmost capacity with war workers, many old colored men in that city, who have been slumbering beside the fire for the past twenty years, have awakened to activity.

Slowly rubbing up a lather over the bristles of a senator recently arrived at the capital to represent his State for the first time, one of these more'n-a-hundred-year-old darkies the other day opened the gates of tonsorial conversation with:

"Senator, do you-all know dar's sumpin' 'bout you dat reminds me o' Dan'l Webster?"

"Why, Sam," said the senator, with an ill disguised but perfectly excusable show of interest and pride, "what is there about me that reminds you of the great Daniel Webster? Is it my massive brow?"

"No, senator. No, 'tain't yer massive brow."

"Then perhaps it's my eye, my eagle eye," suggested the recumbent figure, flashing those orbs in his fiercest manner at the ceiling.

"No, senator. No, 'taint' yer eye."

"Then it must be my jaw, Sam—my square chin and jaw?"

"No, senator. No, 'tain't yer square chin and jaw."

"Well, Sam, come—what is there about me that reminds you of Daniel Webster?"

"Why, senator, it's yer breff."

A Sprig of Rosemary

By William Dudley Pelley

Author of "The Ethics of Pinkie," Etc.

Relating the consequences of one of the most extraordinary dinners ever devised. Only a hint is needed to awaken your curiosity. An old and bitter bachelor plans a forgathering of his one-time sweethearts and sends out invitations. Do they respond? One does. And the results upset and mystify the little Vermont town of Paris

IT was fifteen minutes to eight o'clock on a beautiful October morning. Down Walnut Street in our little Vermont town of Paris strode a lad of twenty-two years. His hands were thrust in his pockets. He was whistling merrily.

The world looked very fair to him on this morning. In the issue of our little local paper for the previous evening had appeared an item to the effect: That on the eighteenth of the present month Miss Mary Brattle, the popular young-lady clerk in the Bon Ton Store, was to be married at the home of her parents to James Price, a member of the staff of the *Evening Telegraph.*

All Paris saw that item and smiled. Because all Paris knew that for upward of three years "Pinkie" Price and the Brattle girl had been "going together." Theirs had been as pretty a love affair as our community had watched for years. But it had been pathetically handicapped because we were paying the boy the limit of our finances for the place which he filled in our office. Then suddenly a tragedy had happened in our town. The body of a certain rich man's wife was stolen from the mortuary in Riverview Cemetery. Pinkie and the Brattle girl solved that mystery. The lad came into possession of five thousand dollars which the rich man had offered. Five thousand dollars meant that he and the girl could realize the greatest anticipation of their young lives. Therefore, with five thousand dollars in the bank and a pretty girl to wed on the eighteenth, was it any wonder that the lad came down Walnut Street whistling merrily?

Pinkie reached the corner of Walnut Street and Maple. He turned north along Maple Street and passed the Judge Farmer place. He came to the top of Maple Street Hill. There he paused. Some one was calling frantically to him.

On the other side of Maple Street, sloping down toward the west, were several acres of ground inclosed by a brown picket fence. Inside the fence were copses of secretive spruce trees, ragged attempts at landscape gardening, and an old brick house.

It was a very old house. The mortar between its bricks was senile and yellow. Gables and sills were decayed and out of plumb. Behind the weather-blistered window sashes were white curtains which had not been raised for years. It was a structure that in its day had been of considerable social importance in our town. But its glory had departed. Paris called it "Old Noah Richards' Ark."

A brick walk ran from the picket gate down among the spruces. Up to this walk now came a woman. A calico apron was thrown around her shoulders. She was waving her arms hysterically, and with strange, incoherent cries seeking to attract the boy's attention.

Pinkie turned and saw her. He stopped his merry whistle. He ran across the street.

"Yes," he cried. "What's the matter, Mis' Pease?"

"Noah's—dead!" gasped the woman.

"What!"

"Noah Richards is dead! I just went into the place to begin the housework for the day. I found him in the dining room; he's there now. He's sitting at the table, and he's dead!"

A strange fright ran through the lad. He glanced down at the lugubrious house behind the spruces. But he was no coward. He went back toward the house with Mrs. Pease. They passed in through the kitchen into the dining room.

Seated at the end of a large dining table was a heavy-set man with a Daniel Webster forehead and Dickensonian whiskers. The table was cluttered with dirty dishes. These had been pushed aside. In the cleared space before him was a huge red blotter, the remains of a pad of writing paper, a bottle of ink with the stopper out, a broken pen, and—an empty wineglass. The man's right arm and hand was outstretched along the edge of the blotter. Stiff, dead fingers encircled the stem of the glass. His eyes were ghastly; they stared straight ahead into space, seeing nothing.

"Somebody else has eaten here!" declared Pinkie when he could take his eyes off the waxen face. "The table's set for six people. Two of the plates have been soiled. I thought Noah lived here alone."

"He does live here alone. Oh, I got to tell it now, I suppose. I was ordered not to say anything about it. But last evenin' Noah Richards give a party."

"Noah Richards gave a party!" gasped Pinkie. "Who come to it, Mis' Pease?"

"Just one old lady."

"What!"

"I don't know who she was or where she come from. But she ate with old Noah in this house last night."

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know."

Pinkie glanced over the room. The morning sunshine was prying in the curtained windows.

"Chief Hogan and Doctor Johnson have got to know about this right off!" the boy declared. "And we mustn't touch nothing, Mis' Pease or we'll be held responsible."

Twenty minutes later, Chief of Police Hogan, Doctor Amos Johnson, our medical examiner, Samuel P. Hod, our newspaper editor, Pinkie, and the housekeeper were gathered in the fatal dining room together. They were watching Doctor Johnson examine the dead man.

Doctor Johnson suddenly looked at the goblet in the dead man's fingers with a puzzled frown. He leaned over and sniffed it. He ran a long forefinger down into it, scraping a finger nail along the bottom and tasting it gingerly.

"This man," he declared in his quiet, tragic way, "has been murdered. This man has been poisoned!"

"What!" cried Chief Hogan.

"Yes, some one has put a deadly drug into a glass of wine. There are traces of the stuff dried on the bottom of the glass and symptoms of it in his condition. It must have occurred last evening. Noah has been dead twelve hours."

"Here's a pretty how d' do," declared the editor. "Noah Richards—murdered! You sure it isn't suicide, doc?"

"I can't conceive of Noah Richards committing suicide," declared the doctor.

"This man's been doin' some writin' on a dinner table set for six folks. What's happened here, anyhow?" demanded Chief Hogan.

"Mrs. Pease says that Noah Richards gave a party last night," volunteered Pinkie. "Tell 'em what you told me, Mrs. Pease."

"I know that durin' the past few days there's been queer carryin's-on in this place," replied the woman. She was a bit hysterical; anxious to absolve herself; still terrified by the stiff, frightful figure in the high-backed chair.

"Yes, Mrs. Pease," prompted Sam Hod kindly.

"Well, first there was young Ashley comin' home from college. He come in the night, late Monday evenin' two weeks ago. I see he was upset. His face was white. When he and his uncle got alone they had a quarrel over somethin'."

"Yes, Mrs. Pease."

"I didn't pay no attention to it; their troubles was none of my business. Next mornin' the nephew was gone. He stayed away a week. Last Sunday afternoon he put in appearance again. But this time he had a girl with him. She was a strange girl, and she warn't crazy about comin' into the house. Ashley had to do a lot o' persuadin'. He coaxed her in at last, and they was all shut into the west library together. They stayed there all Sunday evening, but Ashley and old Noah didn't quarrel. Next mornin' they was gone, same as Ashley alone had been before."

"And you haven't seen her since?"

"I ain't seen *her,* but I seen young Ashley. It was last night in the post office. He was in there writing some letters. I was considerably took back to see he was in town again. He hadn't showed up at the house so far that day. And he was scared and white, like he was before."

"You mean he was one of the dinner party?"

"No, he warn't one of the dinner party. The person that ate at that plate over across there was an old woman. Noah called her Henrietta."

"What about her—and the dinner party?"

"About a week ago Noah come to me as I was workin' in the kitchen. 'Mis' Pease,' says he, 'there's to be doin's at this house some time durin' the comin' week,' says he. 'I'm givin' a dinner, although I ain't sayin' much about who's comin'. I just tell you because I want you should serve it,' says he, 'and for once in your life I want you to get up a real feed,' he tells me. 'There'll probably be six people sit down, and it's got to be a twenty-dollar meal, with wine,' he says. I stood there, just gaspin' at him lettin' me splurge twenty perfectly good dollars on one meal. He goes on: 'I'd just as lief you wouldn't say nothin' about it in the village, Mis' Pease. Folks wouldn't understand,' he says, 'and I don't want they should get nosey, anyhow. This is my house. I guess I could give a private dinner to some friends without the whole place watchin',' says he."

"And you served this meal?"

"I did. It was a fine meal—and most of it went to waste."

"What do you mean?"

"Only one of them guests ever showed up. It was this little old lady. Uncle Joe Fodder's depot hack brought her up the hill around six-thirty. She came down the walk dressed in a faded bonnet and a Paisley shawl. She raps on the door with her old-fashioned umbrella, and Noah goes and opens it himself."

"What then?"

"I don't know what they says or what passes between 'em. I calculate I'm a woman as minds her own business. But along about half past eight old Noah comes into the kitchen, where I'm workin' gettin' things ready. 'When is the rest of the guests for this here party comin'?' I wants to know. 'I'm sorry, Mis' Pease,' says he sadlike. 'I guess they ain't comin' or they'd be here before now. You can serve the meal for two, Mis' Pease. Then you can go home. The lady that's visitin' me is goin' down the valley on the passenger car on the next train. Things can set as they be until you come in the mornin'. You needn't call me. I may sleep a little late,' he says. I served the food, Noah sittin' at one end the big table and this old lady at the other. They stares at one another like they was a couple o' bashful kids. After they'd et in silence and it was close to half past nine, I got on my things and went home, as I'd been told. Now I come back here this mornin' and find —well, here he is!"

The little group looked at the gruesome figure in the high-backed chair. But for the waxen complexion and the set fogginess of the eyes they might

have thought him one of them, sitting there listening to the recital.

"I guess," said Chief Hogan, "that if you're all through examinin' him, doc, we better have him took care of by Blake Whipple, the undertaker. Then we'll search the place. It ought not to be hard to solve this mystery. We'll find out what become of that little old lady, and we'll investigate what young Ashley Richards knows about this dinner."

In due time came the undertaker's wagon, with Blake Whipple and his helper with the long, sinister wicker basket. The dead man was removed. Chief Hogan and the editor began searching the room.

"Well," exclaimed Sam Hod, "what's this?"

Sam lifted the draperies of a portière that hung between the dining room and the west library. Something on the floor had caught his glance.

It was a lead pencil. It was a brand-new lead pencil. But a mere lead pencil being there had not caused the editor's exclamation. He turned it sideways, and on one of the hexagonal surfaces he read in silver-leaf letters:

Read the Paris *Telegraph*—Largest Circulation in Center Vermont.

"I've just found one of the *Telegraph* office pencils," went on Sam. "I ordered them from a drummer to give away as an ad for the paper. But they only came yesterday. So far as I know none of them have been distributed."

"Sure you didn't drop it out of your own pocket, Sam?" asked the chief.

"I haven't dipped into that bundle of new pencils yet. Ever since they arrived they've been in the top drawer of my desk. How about you, Pinkie?"

The boy flushed.

"June Farley give me two of them pencils yesterday afternoon, Mr. Hod," he replied. "I needed some to write my items."

"How did it get here?"

"I don't know, Mr. Hod."

"How many pencils in your pockets now, Pinkie?"

The boy investigated.

"One," he admitted.

"Are you telling me the whole truth, Pinkie?" Sam demanded.

"I certainly am, Mr. Hod."

"Then how did one of the pencils June gave you yesterday happen under this heavy portière in a room where a murder had evidently been committed?"

"I don't know, Mr. Hod——" The boy stopped suddenly. A gleam came into his sensitive face. "Wait!" he cried. "I know—the man in the post office!"

"What man in the post office?"

"It happened about half past six last night. I was in there getting some items from Will Curley at the stamp window. There was a tall, slender chap standing by the desk, writing some post cards. The post-office pens are all rusty, and the ink is pale as water. This chap leaned over and asked me if I had a pencil. Gosh, I hadn't thought about it since! I remember now that I saw Bob Hentley, the lawyer, enter and post some letters. I followed him out to get the names of the folks visiting at his house. I forgot I'd left one of my pencils with the stranger. I didn't go back for it."

"What sort of looking chap was this stranger?" asked Mike.

"He was a tall, slender, dark-complexioned chap, wearing a light overcoat and a big cap."

"Do you know Ashley Richards? Ever see him?"

"No," answered Pinkie.

Mike turned to Mrs. Pease.

"How was young Ashley dressed when you saw him in the post office about the same time, Mrs. Pease?"

"He had on a light overcoat," replied the housekeeper.

"What kind of hat did he wear?"

"It was a soft felt hat."

"Positive of it?"

"Yes."

"That's funny," commented Mike. "Pinkie says he wore a cap, and you say he wore a hat. Which of you is right?"

"Maybe there was two different men, Mike," suggested the editor.

"It stands to reason that if Pinkie loaned this fancy pencil to a man in the post office and that pencil was later picked up here, it was young Ashley to whom Price gave it. Who else would have license in his uncle's house so late at night? One of you folks is simply mistaken about the hat."

Chief Hogan took charge of the pencil. They went on inspecting the rooms.

"It's funny," suggested Sam, "that Noah was discovered sitting here this morning as though he had been writing something. If so, where is it?"

They searched among the soiled dishes. But there was no trace of a document on the table or the floor.

Pinkie suddenly arose from his knees.

"What's this thing?" he demanded. "And what's it doing under old Noah's chair?"

They inspected the article the boy had found on the carpet.

"It's a sprig of some kind of flower," declared Sam Hod. "It's been pressed and dried brittle for a long time between the pages of a heavy book."

"It's a sprig of rosemary," announced the gaunt old doctor.

II.

Noah Richards, retired coal merchant, bachelor, and the last of the Richards' family but one in our town, was found poisoned on Monday morning. Two days passed. In those two days Ashley Richards was arrested for his uncle's murder in the Massachusetts college town where for three years he had been attending school. He was brought to Paris and lodged in the local lockup. The authorities by subsequently discovered evidence believed they had a clean-cut case against him. They made a few impotent efforts to trace the mysterious little old lady. But they gave it up when the days wore on and she dropped completely out of sight.

About eight o'clock of Wednesday evening of that week the doorbell rang in the Brattle home on Pleasant Street.

When Mary Brattle answered, on the veranda stood a dainty young woman of twenty summers. She was dressed in a neat tailor-made suit, smart boots, a hat with a long red feather. The beauty of her face was accentuated by her pallor and the dark circles beneath her eyes.

"Can I see you—alone?" she asked Pinkie's fiancée. "It's about Ashley Richards. I'm his—wife!"

"His wife!" gasped Mary. "Why, I didn't know—no one does—that Ashley Richards had a wife!"

"But he has. And I've come up here to help him. That's just why I want to see you. Please may I come in?"

"Certainly," invited Mary. She led the way into the little front parlor and closed the doors.

"I've come to you," confessed the girl, "not alone because you're to be married soon yourself and can sympathize with me, but my husband's fate lies in the hands of this man you're going to marry. You and he can help me—can help us—more than any one else in town."

"How?" Mary asked in astonishment.

"A cruel net of circumstantial evidence is being drawn around my husband. In the first place, there's the matter of the poison. You know the authorities discovered that two months ago—while Ashley was here on a vacation—he bought some poison in the Metropolitan Drug Store. It was the same kind that the medical examiner discovered in Uncle Noah's glass."

"Yes."

"They don't believe Ashley's story that Uncle Noah sent him after that poison to give a neighbor's dog who persisted in killing his chickens. They say Ashley bought it to kill Uncle Noah for his money. But he wasn't able to administer it until Monday night. If Ashley's story is true, they want to know whose dog was killed. There ought to be one missing, and no one has come forward with the claim of a poisoned dog. Ashley doesn't know why Uncle Noah didn't use the poison any more than you or I. Anyhow, Uncle Noah didn't poison any neigh-

bor's dog—at least effectively—and now it comes back on Ashley as one of the proofs that he committed the crime."

"Yes."

"Next, there's the motive. The police say that Ashley is his uncle's only heir. And that nosey old housekeeper makes things worse by testifying that Ashley and his uncle were always quarreling about money matters. They had a quarrel a few evenings before Uncle Noah was murdered. To get his fortune right away was the motive."

"Yes."

"Well, Ashley and Noah Richards did quarrel over money. But this is the real reason: When Ashley's father died he left money to pay for Ashley's bringing up and his eduction and to give him a start in business. Ashley has been trying for over two years to get the balance that is due him, and Uncle Noah wouldn't give it up. He was one of the worst misers who ever lived. He hated to part with the money in his keeping, even though it wasn't his own."

"Paris can vouch for that," agreed Mary.

"When Uncle Noah heard that Ashley and I had been secretly married he was furious. He stopped my husband's allowance. Ashley came to Paris, and they had an awful time. That was the quarrel this Mrs. Pease says she heard late one evening."

"I understand."

"Uncle Noah made all sorts of excuses. Ashley threatened him with a suit. The man retorted that he would prove Ashley's legacy had been exhausted. Ashley couldn't believe it, but didn't know what to do. Finally he persuaded me to visit his uncle and see if my acquaintance wouldn't alter his attitude. I came, although I was a bit frightened and didn't see what good I could do."

"Yes. That explains the mystery of Mrs. Pease's 'strange girl.' What then?"

"Well, after we'd spent that evening with Uncle Noah, I came away pitying him more than I censured him. He was nothing but a lonely, wifeless, and childless old man. Deep in his heart he was jealous of those who were happily married or who had families and some one to care about them. Because as we visited, he gradually came out of his crabbiness. We got real well acquainted. He grew rather fatherly and tenderly to us as the evening wore on. Once I saw him wiping tears from his hard old eyes. And when it came time for us to leave he said he didn't want us to go. But we had to go. I'm living with my folks. None of them dreams Ashley and I are married. He wants to complete his civil-engineering course so next year he'll be able to land a really big job. He couldn't do it if our marriage came out now, and we had to move to a home of our own and he had to take any job he could get to support us."

"I know," prompted Mary Brattle kindly.

"But before we left that night, Uncle Noah said for Ashley to come back and see him some time during the coming week; he'd try to arrange a loan so my husband could not only graduate but we could announce our marriage and have our own home in the meantime. Night before last my husband arrived back here in Paris on just that errand. He went into the post office and wrote me a card about his safe arrival. That was when Mrs. Pease saw him. She says he was white-faced and frightened. But he wasn't any more white-faced than usual. He had been worried for a long time over finances and my father finding out what we'd done and—everything. Perhaps his worry showed a bit on his face and the housekeeper's imagination did the rest."

"I can see how it could be," replied Mary.

"Ashley got his supper at the lunch room, he tells me. Along toward eight o'clock he went up to his uncle's house. He was surprised to see several windows lighted. He glanced under the dining-room curtains in curiosity. He was surprised to see his uncle at one end of the dining table and a strange

old lady at the other. He watched the queer scene for a long time. Finally he felt that he could gain nothing but his uncle's displeasure by intruding then. He concluded he'd walk around the neighborhood until after the solitary caller left."

"And did he?"

"Yes. He went to a picture show. Around quarter after ten o'clock he came back to the house on the hill. He saw the place still lighted. Glancing under the window shades again, he noted that the little old lady was gone. But his uncle sat in his former place. He had writing materials in front of him, though he wasn't writing. Seeing he was alone at last, my husband entered through the side door. At the entrance to the dining room, he spoke to his uncle. His uncle failed to answer. Ashley went forward and touched him. He saw in an instant old Noah was dead."

"And what did your husband do then?"

"He did something he admits now he shouldn't have done. Instead of calling the authorities, he ran away."

"Why?"

"He was just plain frightened. It came to him that they might accuse him of murder—if they found him alone in the house with a dead man ——"

"But how did your husband know his uncle *had* been murdered?"

"Oh, dear! He didn't! He just imagined so, because he couldn't believe his uncle to be the kind of man to commit suicide. He ran away, down Maple Street and through Mill Street into Depot, and thence to the station. He kept out of sight until the milk train left at midnight. He headed back home to me. It came to him that our financial troubles were over, because, now that old Noah was dead, we were his only heirs. Then yesterday afternoon the police came. Chief Hogan arrested Ashley and brought him back to Paris. And here he is now, down in that horrid old lockup, no money to defend him, no friends to help him——"

"But, my dear Mrs. Richards, why hasn't he told this story to the authorities? That's what's made the chief of police—and all Paris—believe the worst of him. He's refused to say anything, except to repeat over and over that he's not guilty."

"He couldn't say anything without divulging that he was married to me—that our marriage was at the bottom of these activities of his which look so strange to Paris. And he knows how hard the disclosure would make it for me at home, especially if he was convicted. If he can possibly clear himself, he was planning to keep it all quiet until he comes into Uncle Noah's money——"

"Then your husband did drop the advertising pencil in Noah Richards' dining room Monday night?"

"No, Miss Brattle, that pencil business is as much a mystery to us as to you and all Paris. Ashley told me a half hour ago, on his sacred word of honor, that he never borrowed a pencil of Mr. Price in the post office. He swears, too, that he wasn't in the house over three minutes, or near the portières at any time. You remember that Mr. Price declares the man to whom he loaned the pencil wore a cap with his light overcoat. And Mrs. Pease declares that when she saw Ashley he had on a soft hat. That ought to prove Ashley is telling the truth, even if Mr. Price hasn't been able to swear Ashley was or wasn't the stranger to whom he loaned the pencil."

"But there's another piece of damaging evidence, Mrs. Richards," declared Mary. "Just after Pinkie discovered the sprig of rosemary on the carpet, the chief of police and the editor went hunting the west library for clews. And in the fireplace they found three cigarette stubs trade-marked 'Zistas.' When Chief Hogan searched your husband at the jail he found a box of Zistas cigarettes in his pocket. Doesn't that look as if your husband was in the house longer than he has told you; that he was not only in Noah's room, but in the west sitting room as well? And if there's a discrepancy in his statements in this matter of the time he was

in the house, how can we believe he's speaking the truth about all the rest of this defense?"

"Then you don't believe me, or Ashley, either? You don't think I'm—*we're*—telling the truth!"

"But what explanation have you to offer for that pencil business or the cigarettes found in the fireplace or the absence of the writing which Noah Richards had apparently been doing before he was killed?"

"I think—there's another man connected with this mystery, Miss Brattle."

"Another man!"

"He also wore a light overcoat two nights ago—and a cap. That man was in the house when the murder took place. He had time to smoke those three Zistas cigarettes. Zistas is a popular brand of tobacco. That other man could smoke them as well as my husband. Mr. Price admits that in the poor light of the post office he couldn't say that it really was Ashley to whom he gave the advertising pencil. It *might* have been this other man—who had some connection possibly with the mysterious little old lady whom the police cannot locate. Oh, Miss Brattle, we're telling the truth, Ashley and I. I swear it! It's all a mistake—a queer freak of circumstantial evidence. Yet it may convict Ashley. Think of it from my standpoint! It may *convict Ashley!* If he's convicted, he may be electrocuted. Oh, what can I do? What can I do? I've no friends I can turn to; no money to hire detectives to straighten out this; no retainer to give a competent lawyer to clear the man I love. I'm helpless and alone. I'm the only one Ashley's got to fight for him. But I don't know what to say nor how to do it. Put yourself in my place, Miss Brattle! Think if you had been married to Mr. Price for a few weeks and suddenly the officers came and took Mr. Price away for a crime he hadn't committed. How would you feel to have *your* happiness shattered like that, all over a lot of miserable money——" The little wife's voice broke. Her dark eyes swam tears. She bent suddenly over on the arm of the big chair. Her pretty shoulders shook with the sobs that would not be denied.

"But what can Pinkie and I possibly do?" asked the sympathetic Mary.

"Mr. Price could make out—his affidavit that Ashley was *not* the man to whom he gave the pencil in the post office. Then again, he's writing up this case day after day for the local paper, in the town where Ashley will come for trial. He can do it in such a way that convinces Paris and everybody that they're trying the wrong man——"

"But Pinkie can't swear to something he's not sure of. That would be perjury."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! What will I do? What will I do?"

"Don't cry any more," comforted Mary after a while. "Maybe your husband *is* innocent. We'll give him the benefit of the doubt, anyway."

"Ashley and I would do anything for you if you would only help clear him of this terrible misfortune. He's coming into a lot of money if he's cleared. We'd pay you anything——"

"We don't need money. Pinkie and I solved the theft of the Eberhardt body from the cemetery last month. Sam Hod made old Peter Eberhardt pay Pinkie the reward of five thousand dollars which he promised ——"

"You solved a mystery? Couldn't you solve this one?"

"Maybe so. Pinkie's due here any minute. I'll talk to him about it."

A quarter hour later, Ashley Richards' pretty little bride had dried her eyes and made herself presentable for the street. Mary bade her good night from the top of the piazza steps. She watched the other go down the walk toward Pine Street, headed for the local hotel.

She went back into the little parlor. She got a pad and pencil, and curled herself up before the sociable old stove, where a green-birch fire was crackling because the October nights were growing chilly.

When Pinkie's step sounded on the veranda for his usual late evening call, the girl had itemized on the pad all the

salient features of the mystery in her big, box-car handwriting.

III.

"Pinkie," declared the Brattle girl, "you and I have a problem to solve. We solved the Eberhardt mystery by sitting quietly in the hammock and thinking it out. I believe we can solve this Richards mystery in the same way. We've got to concentrate on it and apply a few of Sherlock Holmes' methods."

"What's started you solving the Richards mystery, Mary?"

"Ashley Richards' wife, Pinkie. She's been here."

"Ashley Richards' wife!" gasped the reporter. "I didn't know he had a wife!"

"That's precisely what I said—a half hour ago. But he has a wife, and she's been here. She's weeping her eyes out over what's happened to her husband. And, Pinkie, we've got to help them. They're only just married and happy like we hope to be happy. Now this awful thing has come into their lives." And Mary related what the girl had told her.

The boy whistled softly in surprise when the narration was ended.

"If she's telling the truth, that clears up a lot of the mystery," he agreed. He filled his pipe thoughtfully, and took the easy-chair on the other side the stove. "Well, go ahead, Mary. What do you want me to do?"

"Pinkie, we solved the Eberhardt mystery—at least we hit on the correct hypothesis—by imagining that one of us was Sherlock Holmes and the other Doctor Watson, don't you remember? We tried to visualize Sherlock Holmes turned loose on the case; just what he did and how he went about deducing the solution. And we struck it right. Now why can't we apply the same method to this affair? Why not picture the great detective, storybook hero though he was, called into that house Monday morning after you answered Mrs. Pease's cries for assistance?"

"Go ahead," prompted the boy.

"Well, instead of having Blake Whipple remove the dead man's body, Pinkie, let us say that Chief Hogan declared everything must be left exactly as Mrs. Pease and yourself found it. Chief Hogan wired the great detective to come to Paris. Let us say he and Doctor Watson alighted on the Paris station platform and took Uncle Joe Fodder's rig up to old Richards' Ark. They move down the walk to the side door. Can't you see them, Pinkie? There's Holmes in his queer, double-visored hat, smoking his pipe, with his hands clasped meditatively behind his back, and head bent slightly over. And by his side is Doctor Watson in afternoon dress and a top hat and a cane. They pass into the house and enter the dining room, where the corpse still sits in the chair, with Chief Hogan and Sam Hod and Doctor Johnson all gathered around."

"Yes, I see them," responded the boy.

"Well, what is the first thing Holmes does, Pinkie?"

"He examines the stiff figure in the chair—his position and everything." The boy was lying back with his eyes half closed. His pipe smoke curled up lazily toward the ceiling.

"And what does he say, Pinkie?"

"He says: 'Well, Watson, here's a funny case: A miser gives a dinner to six people, and only one person comes. That person is a little old lady that we know is shy of her host. Yet he knows her well enough to call her by her first name. They eat like a couple of bashful children, and then the old lady goes away. She leaves on the midnight train, and immediately she is gone, for some reason, the host gets out his writing materials and either composes a letter or manufactures a manuscript—which is missing. What do you make out of it, Watson?'"

"And what does Watson reply, Pinkie?"

"Watson says: 'My dear Holmes, it is plain that this man did not sit down here and write something to have it disappear into thin air of its own accord. The authorities say that nothing has been found about the table or the

room to furnish a clew as to what that writing was. Therefore, some one took what he had thus written. And if any one took what this old man had written, they had a motive in taking it; they knew what it was that he wrote, and that it was of value to them.' "

"And what does Holmes reply, Pinkie?"

"Holmes says: 'Right for once, Watson. You are learning, my dear fellow—learning! It seems as if there was the real clew to our mystery—first, why this dead man should pull out writing materials and compose something so shortly after the visit of this strange old lady to his house; secondly, why any one should desire to possess what he had written. It proves that there was some one in this house Monday night—long enough to learn what the old man was writing; long enough to smoke cigarettes in the library; some one who would profit by what he had written, else he would never have taken it with him. We know that an advertising pencil was given to a stranger by a local newspaper reporter in the post office. That pencil was found in this room. Therefore, we can reasonably suppose that there is another man at the bottom of this and that he was here.' "

"Go on, Pinkie. You're doing fine. What else does Holmes say?"

"He says: 'You will observe, my dear Watson, that cigarette stubs were discovered in the grate in the west room. Let us dismiss the fact as coincidence that those cigarettes were of the same brand as those found on the young prisoner—a reasonable coincidence because of the wide sale which the brand enjoys. This unknown person, whom we will designate as Monsieur X, entered this house for some unknown reason and stayed here long enough to learn that old Noah was writing. It was of some value to this Monsieur X, because he took it away with him. But before going, at some time, during his stay in the place, he smoked three cigarettes in the west room and flipped the butts into the fireplace. There was no fire in the fireplace. Now, then, I leave it to you, Watson, would a cunning murderer have left such a trail behind him as cigarette stubs? Cigarette stubs tell many tales, my dear Watson. I myself have written a monograph——' "

"Never mind that, Pinkie. That's following the great detective too literally. What about the cigarette stubs? What story would they tell to Holmes?"

" 'Is it not plain,' Holmes would go on, 'that these cigarettes were smoked *after* the crime took place? Otherwise, would not their penetrating aroma have advised old Noah that an intruder was in the next room? We know from the accounts of Mrs. Pease, who was in the room before the death occurred, that this mysterious Monsieur X was not a legitimate guest at the dinner. We will say that he gained an entrance into the house, secreted himself in the next room or behind the draperies leading from one room to the other, where he dropped the advertising pencil he had borrowed a few hours previously in the post office. He heard what passed between old Mr. Richards and his old lady guest. Subsequently he learned the nature of what old Noah wrote. He wanted that letter or that manuscript. Having secured it, he was confused in his mind as to just what to do. He withdrew into the unlighted west room and meditated. And while so meditating he lighted three cigarettes. It takes about six minutes to smoke down the average cigarette, Watson. Therefore, Monsieur X was in that west room for over a quarter hour.' "

"Fine, Pinkie; fine! But I am sure Watson would remark: 'My dear Holmes, it must have been a document whose value was questionable that made the mysterious caller consider what course he should pursue to the extent of pacing up and down the west room and smoking numerous cigarettes, which he threw into the fireplace.' "

" 'Yes,' Holmes would reply, 'else he would have bolted away with it at once. And does not that make it appear, my dear Watson, that the murder was not premeditated? If this Monsieur X had

gone into the house with the intention of coercing old Noah into writing some kind of paper or putting something in writing for a purpose that necessitated his demise afterward by poison, would not he have his plans all arranged to make a quick get-away?' "

"Well, where are we, anyhow? Sum up what you've deducted so far. What would Holmes say he had established?"

"He would say: 'Well, it appears, my dear Watson, that on the night of this mercenary old man's strange dinner party, an unknown young man dressed in a blue serge suit, a light overcoat, and an auto cap got into this house while the meal was in progress. He secreted himself behind the portières, where he heard all that was going on. Immediately that the old lady left, we can believe that old Noah sat for a time in thought. Suddenly he arose, went to his secretary, and brought writing materials over to the table. He pushed back his dishes, and from the bottle of wine which had been opened during the dinner he poured himself a drink. Shortly afterward he started writing. He wrote for a long time. Now, in order for that Monsieur X to know what old Noah had written and its value, also to give Monsieur X the chance to put the poison in the goblet, we must get Noah out of the room. Let us say Noah needs something for reference, something that takes him out of the place for a long time. What is it? What have we as evidence that old Noah went after?' "

"Why, the sprig of rosemary!" declared the girl, scarcely thinking. She added vaguely: "Rosemary—for remembrance!"

Pinkie laughed. It was all such a nonsensical piece of tomfoolery that he could not help it. It was pitiful, however, when he realized that the happiness of a young bride and perhaps an innocent man's life lay in the success of this slender hypothesis they were trying to build. He felt suddenly ashamed of himself for his laugh. He said quickly:

"All right; old Noah went upstairs after a sprig of rosemary that he had somewhere among his effects. He was gone long enough so that the intruder ventured out from behind the curtains, read what the old man was composing, saw its value, realized that, in order to make its value permament, the old man must die, and so poured poison into his wineglass as a neat, effective way of disposing of him."

"But the poison!" cried the girl, in her eagerness, forgetting the Holmes-Watson fantasy. "That poison, Pinkie! That spoils our whole scheme. That man must have known he was going to do some such thing to old Noah, else why should he have poison with him?"

"He might have found it in the house, Mary. Don't you recollect that Ashley claims his uncle sent him down to the drug store after the same stuff some months before? The neighbor's dog was never poisoned, consequently the stuff was on the premises somewhere. This Monsieur X might have run across it and used it on the spur of the moment."

"Flimsy, Pinkie; awfully flimsy! Unless that poison was right out in plain sight at the moment, I should say it was stretching the long arm of coincidence too far."

"Well, for the sake of the argument, let's say it was—right out in plain sight, on the secretary or somewhere. Monsieur X emptied it into the wineglass and went back to his hiding place. Back comes old Noah with the sprig of rosemary, which he wants for some strange reason in connection with the manuscript. He sits down again, helps himself to another glass of wine—the poisoned glass—to spur his thoughts, and, before starting in to write again, stares forward into space, twirling the stem of the goblet in his finger. He never moves from that position. Drowsiness overcomes him—wide-eyed, terrible drowsiness! In that position his heart stops beating, and his body stiffens in death. When it appears that the drug has done its work, Monsieur X comes out from behind the draperies and takes the manuscript. He goes with it into the next room. There he feels his nerves need stimulant after what he

has done. He proceeds to feed them with cigarettes. He smokes three before his course is clear in his mind. Then he leaves the house and disappears. Well, that hypothesis fits in with all the rest of the clews so far, doesn't it?"

"Yes, Pinkie, but you've wandered away from Sherlock Holmes and Watson. You've forgotten to visualize them. What would they concentrate upon next?"

"It seems to me," replied the boy, "that they'd give a lot of thought and attention to the cause for old Noah giving that dinner; who he invited; why only the one old lady came, and why she came at all. That ought to throw some light on what the old man decided to write after she had left, and thus indicate its character and value. And that would throw light in turn on the reason why the murderer wanted the thing Noah wrote, and thus divulge his identity."

"Well, go on, Pinkie. How would Holmes deduct it?"

"He'd sum up, Mary. I can see him walking around the room and the table and pointing out the objects in turn: 'Here, Watson,' he would say, 'we have a wifeless and childless old man who has just quarreled with his nephew over money matters. We have it on the authority of the nephew's bride that after he made her acquaintance he did not want her to leave him. At times, during that first interview, she says he wiped his hard old eyes where the tears had gathered. That would prove, my dear Watson, that he was a sentimental old topper at heart, underneath all his penury and avarice. Subsequently he forgives the nephew marrying; he offers to make him a loan to finance his secret matrimony; he tells his housekeeper he is going to have a dinner. What more natural, Watson, in view of all this, and also the identity of the old lady who responded, and the sprig of rosemary—for remembrance—that the old man's thoughts were turned backward by his nephew's bride and their happiness to other years when a similar circumstance may have come near occurring in his own? What more natural, in view of the nervousness which they both displayed, than that this old woman who responded was an old sweetheart of his, back over the years? You remember he called her Henrietta. And yet he did not know her so well but that he was embarrassed in her presence.' "

"Pinkie," cried the girl excitedly, "I believe what old Noah wrote was a sentimental letter, saying to her the things he didn't dare say at the dinner party. Don't you see? He got to thinking over other scenes and other years after she had gone, and he felt he ought to write—either to her or some one—about the loneliness in his soul, stirred by the return of this old lady and seeing her thus after so many years when both had grown old. And in order to remind some one of something that had occurred in the past, or to prove something, he needed that sprig of rosemary which he had hidden away somewhere in his effects. You've stumbled onto something, Pinkie. This hypothesis is beginning to look reasonable."

"Mary," declared the boy slowly and gravely, "five plates were set around that table in addition to his own. Could it be possible—yes, why not?—it seems funny, but it's reasonable. Mary, do you suppose old Noah Richards took it into his head to give a dinner to five girls he had loved—one at a time, of course—back in the days of his boyhood or young manhood, and that only this one old lady was alive or willing to respond and meet him after the lapse of years?"

"It's the most reasonable explanation of that dinner that's been advanced yet, Pinkie."

"Mary—maybe our hypothesis is nonsense. But it's been responsible for one thing. I'll bet we've discovered the truth: That old lady was one of Noah Richards' sweethearts in his younger days; he sent for her—and whoever else the plates were meant for—in order to see what she looked like after all the years. The happiness of Ashley and his girl wife caused sweet and sad reflections that awakened the

sentiment in his heart to do it. Mary, I'll bet we're right!"

"Then why doesn't the woman come forward and disclose who she is and what happened on that fatal night?"

"There may be several reasons. First, maybe some one doesn't want her to do it. The mysterious Monsieur X may know that it interferes with his plans. Or she may be frightened. Or maybe she lives very far away, and the news of the murder hasn't reached her yet."

"Then you think all we've got to do is to look up the sweethearts of this old man's youth until we find one called Henrietta. Then we can trace her back to her home. And when we find her——"

"Maybe she can throw some light on who administered the poison to Noah. Even if she can't, we'll have whittled away a lot of the mysterious features of this affair. Mrs. Ashley Richards has cleared up many of them to-night. We've deducted until we've eliminated a lot more, at least a plausible reason for that dinner and the presence of the old lady. Now we've got to find that old lady and then fit into the scene a motive for an unknown third person being present and stealing what old Noah had written, which would only have a value after his death—a letter of some kind—perhaps for blackmail, who knows? There the mystery ought to end. But there's a lot of work and expense connected with such a case, Mary."

"Ashley would reimburse us after we clear him. And we've really fallen into possession of an awful lot, Pinkie. We ought to be generous and help them if we can."

"All right, Mary. Commencing to-morrow, I'll start and burrow into Noah Richards' past and try and find a former sweetheart named Henrietta."

"Well, how about Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson?"

"Leave 'em in the room with the corpse overnight. They can be nosing around with their theories and magnifying glasses while we look into this gray-haired-sweetheart business."

IV.

The following morning, Pinkie did not come into the Bon Ton Store to see the girl, as was his habit.

About eleven o'clock old Slob Hopper, the town idiot, came into the millinery store, however. He had some leaves from the reporter's notebook on which a message had been scribbled hurriedly.

"Pinkie see me down to the depot," said he, handing over the communication and twirling his ragged cap foolishly. "He was just catchin' the ten-thirty train down the valley. He writ this message, and gimme a dime to bring it to you."

The girl shoved her long sales pencil in her hair. She opened the note. It read:

DEAR MARY: Sorry I couldn't stop in the store to tell you what great success I've had. But I spent too much time searching the files this morning. When I finally found what I wanted, and got permission from Sam Hod to leave my job for a couple of days to run down our clew, I had to *run* for the train. I'm waiting for it to pull out any moment now.

The first man I saw this morning was Pat Whitney, who runs the hotel. You know he was a great friend of Noah's. He gave me a lot of the family history. Noah was the eldest of his father's two sons. When he was a young man he went West. He stayed out there for several years. On his return he didn't come back to the family home here in Paris. He settled in the coal and iron business in a town down in Massachusetts. Pat didn't know its name, but he said he thought Noah came back here in '86, because his father died at that time. And in order to get the details of all that, what do you suppose I did? I went to the office and got down all the old, old files of the Paris *Weekly Telegraph*. I went through all the items of that bygone year. I was two hours going through them. But I got what I wanted. I found an article about old Ebenezer Richards' death and the visit of his eldest son, Noah, from where he was living down in Longmeadow, Massachusetts.

That's given me my clew, Mary. I'll bet we're right. Those other four places weren't occupied at Noah's queer dinner because those other friends of his were girls he'd known in the old days in the West. Probably they'd died in the meantime, or it had been too far for them to make the trip. But there was one woman living fairly close by—down in Massachusetts. Her name was Henrietta.

So I'm going down to Longmeadow, which

is a town beyond Springfield, Mary. I'm going to interview some of the oldest inhabitants, and see if they remember one Noah Richards, who used to live there. It ought to be easy for them to remember if he ever had a lady friend whose first name was Henrietta——

The writing at this point trailed off in a wavy line. Evidently the train had started before the boy could write further.

A few moments later the girl looked up to see a familiar figure entering the store. It was a dainty girl of twenty summers in a tailor-made suit, smart boots, and a hat with a long red feather. The face was even paler than on the previous evening.

"Did you talk it over with Mr. Price?" asked the accused boy's wife, with pathetic anxiety in her eyes.

"You bet we did, little Pocahontas!" laughed Mary in sheer exuberance of spirit. My knight-errant has left town on the quest of the Holy Grail, and it's ten to one he comes back victorious. You see, I know that Pinkie lad. When he's got a big stake to play for, he sits up and pays attention. I was one of the stakes he played for, and —look at me! He had a Scotch mother, an Irish father, and he was born in America. Can you imagine a lad like that coming back to report a failure?"

But Mary had to stop her exultation. The little wife was brushing the ready tears from under her eyes and trying to smile. And after the manner of all normal daughters of Eve, at the sight of that heroism the little wife was trying to bring to her aid, Pinkie's girl wanted to cry herself.

It was early evening when the boy reached Springfield. He had never been there before. He lost much valuable time in locating the place to take the right trolley car that would carry him to the town to the south.

Thus it was after eight-thirty when he finally walked into one of the principal grocery stores after information.

"I want to find," he announced to a group of nation rulers around the stove, "some man or woman with a good memory who's lived in this town since the Civil War. Do you know of such an old resident?" And the boy followed up the question with an explanation of his daily occupation.

The men gathered around the stove looked at one another.

"Send him over to old Peter Stewood," declared one of them after a thoughtful pause. "Only this time o' night old Peter's liable to be abed."

Nevertheless, they gave Pinkie careful directions how to reach the house. The boy went out into the fall night and tramped a long mile southward. Thence, in front of the church, he took a sandy road east. As per his directions, he came finally to a little brick cottage house behind a row of maple trees, the corners barnacled thickly with lilacs. One weak, yellow light was burning in the back kitchen of this place.

Pinkie disturbed an uproarious shepherd dog by his knock through the quiet house. Several moments passed before a plump young woman unbolted the door, carrying in her left hand an oil lamp.

"Peter Stewood is my father," she replied in answer to Pinkie's question. "He's just going to bed."

She invited the boy into the quiet little sitting room, with its old-fashioned rockers, its reading table covered with a red cloth, its hanging lamp, and its atmosphere of carbon from burned oil.

A skinny old man, badly knotted with rheumatism, and the snow-white hair standing up all over his bony skull like wire, finally shuffled out interrogatively from a side room. His vest was unbuttoned. He took the biggest rocking-chair, and as he sat down his head rocked childishly. He put one hand behind his ear like a huge scoop. The daughter reappeared, and assisted him to understand the questions which Pinkie put to him.

"I'm a newspaper reporter," explained the boy, "and I'm looking for some one who remembers a certain man who once lived in this town back in the '70's and the '80's. His name

was Noah Richards, and he was in the coal and iron business. They tell me up to the store that you might remember a Noah Richards. When he lived here he was a young man of about thirty years old, and he kept company with a young lady named Henrietta."

"Yes! Yes!" cried the old man childishly and with a pleased smile. "Noah Richards! Yes, yes! Kept company with Henrietta Bancroft. Yes, yes; I remember!"

The lad's heart gave a great thump. Henrietta Bancroft! So he and Mary *were* right—thus far!

"That's what I want to know," the lad went on, scarcely able to repress his exaltation. "But he didn't marry Henrietta Bancroft, you remember. He left here and went back to Vermont when his father died up there. And he stayed a bachelor."

"Yes, yes—that's right!" exclaimed the pleased old man, when this information got to his brain.

"Now what I particularly want to find out from you is who *did* Henrietta Bancroft marry?"

The old man bent forward in thought. The smile stayed on his withered old face. He was living the past over again with all the pitiful pleasure of the aged.

"Lemme see; lemme see," he mumbled over and over. "Why, Henrietta Bancroft married Arnold Thomas' oldest boy—what was his name, now? It was Robert, warn't it, Mabel?"

"Yes," replied the daughter. "She was left a widow, with several small children to raise, when the oldest boy was only eight years old."

Breathlessly the boy put the crucial question:

"And where is she now?" Then he set his jaw for the answer:

"Why, she's living two miles out on the Palmer Road in the old Thomas place. She lives there with another old lady, Maria Higgins—and the hired man who does the chores. Her only girl died at seventeen. The four boys have all grown up and left home."

"I don't suppose I could see her tonight if I went out there?"

"No," responded the other. "Better wait until morning."

The boy remained and talked with the old man, and listened to reminiscences of strange people about whom he cared nothing, in order to repay the old man for the service he had done him. When finally he retraced his steps back to the village, he wanted to cry aloud in the joy of his success.

"Gee, this is working out as if it was oiled!" he told himself. "All the same, I thought of the idea! It was the sprig of rosemary that suggested this old-sweetheart clew. I see where I'll have to quit the newspaper business and set up as a great detective."

The boy returned to Springfield and spent the night in a hotel. He was back in Longmeadow on almost the first suburban trolley in the morning. He took the two-mile walk out the Palmer Road. At the top of a rolling hill, set behind four beautiful maples, a low, pleasant old farmhouse greeted him in the morning sunshine. There was no mistaking the place. The Stewood girl had described it most carefully.

A cat that was sunning herself on the side steps blinked at him pleasantly as he came up. The yard was fragrant with the scent of a huge woodpile near by. On some wooden spikes shone a row of polished milk tins, glinting in the autumn sunshine. The boy knocked. On the other side the door came a shuffling footstep. The thin, old-fashioned panels swung inward.

True enough, in the doorway behind the string-mended screen door that had not yet been taken off for the winter, stood a sweet-faced, little old lady. Her hair was parted in the center and crimped down over her ears. There was a lace collar about her neck. Steel spectacles were pulled halfway down her nose. She looked like the pattern for all the small boys' grandmothers in the universe.

"Are you Mrs. Henrietta Thomas?" faltered Pinkie.

"Yes," she replied, looking up into his face with wondering eyes.

"On Monday of this week may I ask

if you went up to Paris, Vermont, and visited an old friend of yours by the name of Richards?"

"Why—yes," she said. Her face suddenly changed. Over it came a look of sorrow. She faltered: "You ain't come way down here to tell me the news? Because I know. I just heard this mornin'. It's too bad! It's awful!"

"You mean you just heard about Noah Richards' death?"

"Yes."

"You used to go with him when he was a young man and lived in Longmeadow?"

"Yes; Noah and I kept company for quite a spell. But I married Robert instead, and it sort of upset him, I guess. I never dreamed he was goin' to take it so hard. He never married. He told me that my takin' Robert was the reason—told me the other night for the first time. I ain't sorry I went up to see Noah the first of the week, now that he's passed so suddenly. He was changed an awful lot, but it was pleasant to talk for a spell about old times and real nice of him to invite me up; I go so few places."

The boy was almost ill with the suspense and portent of the situation as he put the next question:

"Mrs. Thomas, tell me—who was the young man in the light overcoat and cap who was in the house at the time Noah entertained you Monday evening and afterward came down on the night train with you?"

Again the boy set his jaw as he waited her reply. She did not answer at once. Plainly she was puzzled.

"I can't say. I don't remember there was any young man. Who do you mean?" she asked.

It took the boy several seconds to sense his disappointment. He had found the "little old lady" in the case so quickly and easily that he expected to find the young man in the case without any hitch. But evidently his good luck stopped here. Alas! She did not know anything more about the mysterious Monsieur X than the rest of them.

"Mrs. Thomas, I'm a newspaper reporter," he declared aimlessly, striving to think what he should do now. "But I'm also acting as a sort of amateur detective. While Mr. Richards was entertaining you there was a strange man in that old house—right in the next room, listening to all that was taking place. After you came away, Mr. Richards brought out paper and writing materials, and for some time sat at the table, writing. During that time he required a certain sprig of rosemary which he had somewhere in another part of the house. He left the dining room to get it, and while he was away that unknown man came out, read what Mr. Richards had written, and saw possibilities in appropriating it to his own purposes that prompted him to drop some poison into Mr. Richards' glass of wine left beside his plate. Having killed Mr. Richards, this unknown man then fled the place with what your former lover had composed, and is now at large. The police want him very badly. I have hunted you up, hoping you might know who that man was and——"

"You don't mean to say that Noah was—murdered!"

"Surely he was murdered, Mrs. Thomas." Pinkie had his self-concocted hypothesis so firmly rooted in his mind that unconsciously he thought of it as fact. He forgot that what he was telling her was only his own imaginings.

"But the letter didn't say so!"

"What letter?"

"Why, the letter I got yesterday from this Mr. Bolton."

"What letter are you referring to, Mrs. Thomas?"

"Why, this Mr. Bolton, of the Springfield *Daily Times;* he forwarded me Noah's letter. That's how I come to know of his death."

"Now you're referring to something that *I* don't understand."

"Do you want I should get the letter?"

"I wish you would, Mrs. Thomas."

"Won't you come in?" she invited. She held open the string-mended screen

door with the paper fringe pasted across the top.

It was two hours past noon when Pinkie finally arrived back in Springfield. Engrossed on the chase, sure of himself, boyish in his enthusiasm at his rapidly evolving success, he went into the office of the big daily paper. He was directed to the editorial offices on the second floor.

"I want to see Mr. Bolton," he declared to the girl at the telephone switchboard in the hall.

"In the Sunday room—fourth door down the hall to your left."

Pinkie went down the hall and into the apartment marked "Mr. Waters" on the glazed glass. There were half a dozen roll-top desks in the room and as many flat-topped tables. These were piled high with books and papers and copy and clippings. The floor was likewise strewn with them.

The boy repeated his request to a little, sandy-haired, fat man at the first desk.

"That's Bolton over there at the exchange table," indicated the fat man.

Pinkie looked at the chap indicated.

In that moment he knew positively—sitting twenty feet away was *the identical male person to whom he had given the loan of a pencil three or four days before.*

This young man pulled aside the paper he was reading as Pinkie came clumping over.

"Yes; I'm Bolton," he said. "What do you want?"

"I want," answered Pinkie, "the return of that pencil I loaned you up in the Paris post office Monday evening."

Bolton's face went suddenly white to the lips. He took his feet from the edge of the table. He sat upright.

"What are *you* doing down here?" he demanded.

"I'm down here to give you yours!" retorted Pinkie. "An innocent man is in jail for what *you've* done!"

"Who's in jail?"

"Old man Richards' nephew, Ashley."

"What do you mean? What's he jailed for? What's happened, anyhow?"

"They've made out a fine case of circumstantial evidence against Ashley Richards. He happened to come back to Paris the same evening you were there, and they've got the two of you mixed up. And all this time you've been holding onto the documents which would clear him. You needn't deny it. I've just come from Mrs. Henrietta Thomas' place."

"But look here—let me explain."

"Well, go ahead and explain; I'm listening."

"I got in from Vermont around five o'clock Tuesday morning. Almost the moment I set foot in the office that following forenoon, this newspaper bundled me off in a rush to get a big local story out of a business combine that's just gone over out in York State, in which some of the big guns on this paper are particularly interested. I wrote my Sunday story of the Richards dinner party en route. I got back last evening. As soon as I could I mailed Mrs. Thomas the manuscript that seemed to rightfully belong to her."

"And don't you know that ever since it happened the authorities have been looking for you?"

"What did they want *me* for?"

"For murder, of course!"

"Wanted me for murder! But there wasn't any murder done!"

"There wasn't any murder done!" cried the boy.

"Haven't you read Noah Richards' letter?"

"Well—not all! There hasn't been time."

"Well, read it!" advised the Springfield man angrily.

"What were you up there for, anyhow? What connection have you really had with the case?"

"Then you don't know?"

"I haven't quite placed you yet."

"Here's my connection with the case." And, saying which, the newspaper man reached up on a hook and pulled down a great sheet of newsprint paper, ruffled and crinkly from having

been wetted and then air-dried. It was the first planer proof of a newspaper page—the page of a Sunday edition. In great, flaring letters across an eight-column page, Pinkie read:

WHEN THE CANDLE SNUFFED OUT!

The Strangest Dinner Party Ever Staged.

Eccentric Old Millionaire Bachelor, Disappointed in Several Love Affairs, Gives a Dinner on the Last Night of His Life to All the Sweethearts That He Ever Loved. Softened and Made Reminiscent by the Happiness of an Only Nephew's Secret Marriage, He Conceives the Idea of Entertaining Old Girls, but Only One Responds. Found Dead by His Own Hand the Next Morning Because of Resulting Melancholia!

Pinkie sat down on the edge of the table and read the whole page of that story, eight columns of it, luridly illustrated by a sensational newspaper artist.

"Say," demanded Pinkie when he had read the last word, "what's the big idea, anyhow?"

"Big idea? There isn't any special 'big idea.' I've got a friend over in Longmeadow that saw Mrs. Thomas' strange invitation a week ago. I recognized there was a swell Sunday feature in this weird dinner the old bachelor was giving to all the girls he had ever loved. It was so strange, so out of the ordinary, and yet it was something that had the proper sob stuff in it; lots of old men would like to give similar dinners and see their old girls and talk over old times with them just for an evening. So, unbeknown to Mrs. Thomas, I slipped up to Vermont and to Paris on Monday afternoon. I got in on the six-thirty."

"And I met you in the post office."

"Sure; I slipped in there to drop a letter back to this paper. There was some work I'd left undone that I wanted one of the boys to look after in my absence. I went in to your local post office, and, while writing it, I borrowed your pencil. Later in the evening I went up to the Richards' house."

"How did you get in?"

"I walked in. I rang the bell several times. Finally Noah Richards came and admitted me. I told him who I was, but not what I wanted—not then. I represented I wanted information about some folks he'd known years before in Longmeadow, and I had quite a talk with him about them."

"Whereabouts?"

"In the library."

"Then that's how you came to throw the Zistas cigarettes into the grate!"

"Yes; there was a box of them lying on the table. Mr. Richards told me to take it away. He said it belonged to his nephew, who'd been smoking them in that room a week before. He was smoking a cigar himself as we talked, and as he didn't have a mate to offer me he suggested Ashley's forgotten cigarettes instead."

"And you smoked three of them!"

"How do you know?"

"You left the stubs in the grate. What happened then?"

"I pumped all that I could out of old Noah that would help me in giving the foundation for my Sunday story. I thanked him and left him. He just closed the door after me; he didn't lock it. Instead of leaving the place, I stood outside on the walk, debating. It occurred to me that I wouldn't be doing any especial damage by sneaking back into the house and secreting myself, while I overheard all that passed at that strange dinner. So I went back through the unlocked door, back through the big hall, moved across the dining room when there was no one in it, and found a place for myself behind the portières."

"And you heard everything they talked about—Noah and Henrietta Thomas?"

"I sure did. It was one of the biggest and best Sunday yarns I ever got."

"And you claim Noah committed suicide. Tell me just what happened after Mrs. Thomas left."

"Mr. Richards sat for a long time perfectly still, after he'd returned from bidding the woman good-by at the front door and the depot carriage had borne her away to catch the train.

Then he arose and paced up and down the room. He walked to his secretary in the west library—passing me by only a few inches. He returned with an old, dried sprig of flowers in his hand. He sat down with it in front of him. He took a glass of wine. Then he stared at the flower with great, sad eyes; a look I shall never forget. It upset me worse than the look in his eyes after his death."

"Then he wrote a letter, you say, to Mrs. Thomas?"

"I'm coming to that. Old Richards drank too much of the wine. The more he drank, the more melancholy he grew. Finally he arose, went again to the secretary, and returned with paper and writing materials. He shoved back the soiled dishes, and alone in the great house—excepting for me that he never dreamed of being there—he penned that swell article I mailed to Mrs. Thomas yesterday. I suppose the wine gave him the mental stimulus to compose that fine article."

"And after he'd written it, what happened?"

"It was long after ten o'clock when he got it done, and I was in torture, having to keep so quiet all that time behind the portières. Once I dropped my pencil—your pencil—to the floor, and I thought sure he heard it and would discover me. I had no chance to recover it. I just had to stand there. He raised his head suddenly at the noise so close at hand. But his mind was on his work. He went on until he had it completed."

"Then what did he do? That's the part I'm interested in most."

"He just leaned over—with the sprig of rosemary that the old lady had given him for remembrance back over the years, clutched in his hand—and he sobbed over it like a schoolgirl. It was almost comic to hear him cry—him an old man with whiskers; men don't know how to weep, anyhow. After a while he got up and paced the room. But it seemed as if the wine made him dizzy or something. He went into the kitchen, and returned with a paper bag. It contained some kind of white crystals. He dropped an unholy dose of them into his wineglass, and took still another glass. He had it swallowed like a flash—before he could save himself by giving serious consideration to his act. He simply did it on a melancholy impulse—and after I'd read what he'd written I understood."

"And he died?"

"Yes, he died. He gave one or two ghastly contortions. Then he grew suddenly still. There was one small moan out of him. That was all. I knew then that I was 'in Dutch.' I saw he was dead and that it would be hard work to explain my presence there in the house. I debated for a moment what I should do, and in those moments I picked up his manuscript from in front of him. I read it hurriedly, and realized it was a swell find to incorporate in my Sunday story, also that it might clear me of blame if I was charged with the crime. But first I had to make my get-away. I decided not to use it until I *was* charged with the crime; that is, not for my personal defense, although I have used it in the Sunday story, as you see. I got away without any one knowing, and returned to Springfield. I didn't hear anything more about the case, although I'll admit that since my return I haven't looked over the files to learn just where it stands at present. Then I made—or had made—photographic copies of that document while I was out in York State to keep for my own defense. The originals I forwarded, with a letter of partial explanation, to Mrs. Thomas. It gave me the shivers to have that dead man's property in my possession, particularly when it belonged to his gray-haired sweetheart and was meant by the dead man for her. But what I want to know now is: How did you find me out?"

"I traced Mrs. Thomas," declared Pinkie, "and she showed me your 'letter of partial explanation' this morning. The rest you've told me. I guess everything is explained. But it's lucky I traced her. Because that old lady wouldn't have sent Noah's letter up to Vermont in a thousand years. She

don't read the papers enough to even know that Noah has been dead three days—didn't know anything about it until she got that long envelope from you."

V.

At nine o'clock of that same evening, four people were gathered around the fat, sociable old stove in the little front parlor of the Brattle home on Pleasant Street. Mary was there, curled up in the big chair by the lamp. Pinkie was there, his pipe smoke mounting lazily toward the ceiling. On the divan, between the windows, reclined a tall, slender, good-looking young fellow; his arms around the shoulders of a little woman whose tailor-made jacket and hat with the long red feather were hung in the hall outside. On the young wife's face was a glorious happiness touched with tears.

Mary Brattle was reading—reading aloud the document which Pinkie had brought back, together with the Sunday-special writer's affidavit. The document and the affidavit had brought about a speedy release for Ashley Richards.

And this is what had released Ashley:

ROSEMARY—FOR REMEMBRANCE.

There comes a time in the life of a man when he strikes an accounting with his soul. There are some men whoses lives run in pleasant places, beside green pastures and peaceful waters. There are others for whom life has been a battle; their pathways have been dark and filled with cruel shadows; their hearts are deeply scarred with the experiences through which they have gone. But for both there comes a time when they must weigh themselves for the manner of men which they have shown themselves. The day may be postponed. It cannot be avoided.

I have reached that day. I have come to a place in life when I have been minded to look back over the years, to see myself in relation to them, to view my soul in its nakedness. In this week which has passed, in this night which is going, I have indeed weighed myself. And I have found myself—wanting. I am minded to write you how mean and small I have come to know my real self at last; how selfish I have been; how little I realize now that it has availed me; how much greater have been the vicissitudes of those I have left by the wayside. Bear with an old man who sees now that his life can be naught but shadows. The shadows were of his own creation. He has indeed paid—and still is paying—the penalty.

This week my nephew has married. At first I was filled with displeasure. I should have held nothing against the boy. I was only jealous when I looked upon his happiness. Poor lad! There is so much ahead which he must live through. His is the courage of ignorance, the happiness of ignorance, indeed! But it is a blessed ignorance. Would that I also might dispense with a little of this thing which I have come to believe is wisdom. Yes, I was jealous of his happiness, for my life has been barren of many pleasant things. Yet I repeat, there has been no one but myself, nothing but my vanity and my selfishness, which have decreed that this state should be.

I saw my nephew and his bride, and something which had been growing in my starved and scarred heart grew tender in spite of myself. And when they had gone and my house was left unto me quiet once more, I fell to thinking of other years and other scenes and other faces. And a great and terrible sorrow possessed me. A great and terrible longing came over me. I could not go back; no, I could not go back, for that is the cruel way of life. But I no longer battled against the memories.

No, I gave those memories free play in my soul, and my soul did its reckoning with me.

Alone in my desolate house, in the sunset of my years, I thought of those whom I had loved—with whom I might have enjoyed all that I now realize makes a man wealthy—far more wealthy than money that I have possessed, could ever make him. Few indeed are the men who have not loved more than one woman, and to this rule I have been no exception.

First, in my memories came a sweet face—a little figure in pink, back in the days of a poor little, dear little, pathetic little schoolhouse lost far up somewhere in the New England hills. Sunshine was bright in those days. Birds sang sweeter than ever before. Every hour was a golden moment, and time was but a thing to pass away. I was only a boy, with the petty little sorrows and heartaches of a boy. But I loved the little girl in the pink pinafore—she waited for me many nights after school, and in the setting sun we walked down the sandy, dusty country road together. But we had a quarrel, I remember. I had a candy bag, and I was selfish in giving her a portion of that candy. And she called me selfish. She went home by herself. And that week her parents moved away out of the hills. I do not know where they went. Years and years later she moved back to that old town with her children.

But the love which had once been could never be again. We went our separate ways; lived our separate lives. Yet, as I

have taken stock of my soul, I have been forced to recognize that even in that far-off day it was my selfishness—portentous of a greater selfishness to come—which brought that first boyhood disappointment.

Since that time there have been other girls whom I have loved. There is a face in the album of my memory for a girl in my young manhood in a little New England town; for a girl far in the golden West; a city girl whom I nearly married for the wealth that was her legacy. Last comes the face that I have looked on again this night. It was fair once in those courtship days now bittersweet in memory. I can sense myself walking with you under the cherry blossoms, and I ask you the old, old question beneath the stars while the frogs peep in the lowland places and the fireflies swing out their tiny lanterns over the meadows. But you told me it could never be—and why. You will not trust your happiness to me. Verily you know me better than I know myself. And we came at last through an old-fashioned garden. You stooped as I am leaving in my disappointment and my anger. You gave me a little sprig of rosemary—for remembrance. It is only a faded flower before me now. But God, God, what it stands for! What it stands for!

You married for love, dear girl—love of a man who was less selfish, less self-centered than myself. There were many bitter times when poverty came, and mother pain left traces on your once fair face. But you had your task to do, and, helped by love, you set your slender hand to do it. And I, in my pride—I remember that I laughed and taunted you. That is the pity—the very great pity—of it.

I remember the time when the man whom you married died, dear girl. He left you with many helpless little children. But you did not despair. Nobly you took up your cross of mother love, and bore it resolutely onward. "Troubles are given us to be overcome," was what you said. And: "I'll manage somehow!" Brave, brave words! "I'll manage somehow!" And you did manage, somehow!

I remember how you went to work in the little village printing office, dear girl. Ah, years and years ago, that was! Before a grimy type case, you started the cruel task of earning enough to raise those little children. Alone, unaided, panic-stricken in the midnight when you thought of what might happen to them if your strength gave way, you did your daily tasks, one day at a time, as the good mothers all over America have done them, are doing them to-day—unwept, unhonored, and unsung—and will be doing them long after the suns of our lives have set.

And I, dear girl, seeing you to-night again after the lapse of years, and knowing these things, have realized at last what my life has become. I have done nothing for society; nothing for my community or my State or my race. I have lived a life of selfishness. I have existed in a universe of which I, to myself, have been the center. I have avoided sacrifice. I have left broken hearts behind me because I thought of myself first and others last. I have come to the sunset years, and my life is desolate. I have looked on your face again. The pathos of the work and the care which have left their traces there, the nobility of it, have been as a rebuke to me. I hold no mark in any man's esteem. I have laid up treasures for myself where moth and dust corrupt and thieves break through and steal. And the moth and dust of time has corrupted that in which I placed a value. Thieves in the form of remorseful melancholy thoughts have stolen my happiness. I have taken an account with my soul. I am found out.

Lay no blame on any one for the thing which I may do. The blame is mine—all mine. I am of no use to any one. I fulfill no good place in society. There are none to mourn my loss when I am gone. Your life, as I have come to know it at last to-night, is a great glory. Mine has been a sham and a bit of brassy mummery. It is better that I go now on a far journey and that I do not return, because the few years now remaining cannot matter. There will only be nights of continued remorse and heartache and self-reproval. It is too late now to undo the thing which I have done. This is the best thing I can do; the best thing I ever did—that I remove myself from my fellows where I am but a superfluity, an object of contempt in the eyes of better men and women.

Here before me, as I go, is a sprig of rosemary—rosemary for remembrance—which I have kept from one night over the years. I will inclose it in this envelope, and when I am found here I hope that the envelope will be forwarded to you.

Good night and good-by, dear girl. Good night and good-by to all the visions, the memories, the faces, and the scenes of brighter, better, and happier days! God help me—help me to be a better man in another chance—Out There!

A sprig of rosemary! Rosemary—for remembrance!

It has been—to you it will be now at last—a voice, a voice from the dead!

An hour later, as Ashley Richards and his wife were leaving, the lad turned to the reporter and said:

"I owe you something for what you've done, Price. When I come into my uncle's money I'll——"

"You won't pay me a darn cent. It made a great story for the *Telegraph*. It was all in the day's work," declared Pinkie.

A Little Close Harmony

By Hugh S. Fullerton

Author of "A Hoopensploffer By Any Other Name," Etc.

Some quartet, this, with a left fielder for the lead, the first baseman a bass, a pitcher warbling tenor, and a short-stop filling in—to say nothing of the outside chorister who kept butting in

NO, sir, you can't never tell who starts trouble in a baseball club any more than you can tell which one starts a married couple toward the divorce court. Watch them divorce cases and you'll see a great, big, hulking two-hundred-pounder with a gabled head and a face like a preliminary-bout prize fighter, and, just about the time you get to hoping that the court sends him up for life, you get wise to the fact that the sweet, innocent-looking little woman, weighing about a hundred and two, has been beating him up until he can't stand it any longer.

It's that same way in a ball club. The trouble starts, you commence hunting around to find out who started it, and, nine times out of ten, it's the last fellow on the team you ever would have suspected. There are trouble hunters and trouble keepers up, and any number of guys that won't bat an eyelash to dodge trouble, and there are some who won't be happy until they get it, but the starter is the boy I'm afraid of. The worst is one of them kind that starts it, looks innocent, and is an interested spectator while half a dozen other fellows are beating each other's heads off and not knowing why.

That was the kind of a fellow Jimmy Hicks was. I found Hicks, and if I had suspected he was the kind of a starter he turned out to be, I'd have fed him some nice, fresh arsenic, and if Slough hadn't been so enthusiastic about Hicks at first he'd have killed me for bringing him to the club. Hicks certainly fooled me. When I discovered him I thought he was about the nicest ball player I ever knew. He was young and good looking, a college man, and, in spite of that, he was as smart as if he had learned the game on the lots. He had an awful lot of sense for a college-educated fellow, and he wasn't noisy and fresh like most of them, or swelled on himself like the others. I was stuck on him, especially after seeing him stretch them short hits for two bases and lay down bunts. He was fast and clever, and he could throw and hit and run, and when I left Decatur after buying him I felt so good about it I went into the buffy car and bought myself two bottles of beer. I noticed that them Decatur fellows didn't bring any brass bands to the station to bid him good-by, but I figured they was jealous because he was going into the big show. I might have saved a lot of trouble by asking a few questions. You couldn't even tell by his clothes that he was a college man; he didn't wear them loud socks and ties, and his clothes was cut just like citizens' clothes.

Them was the days when we had a ball club that played baseball on and off the field, and it was the most harmonious team Slough ever got together. Honest, I don't think we averaged more than two battles a week all that season. It was just like a big, happy family traveling around and winning ball games and having a good time. There wasn't none of that rough-house stuff. We acted like perfect gentlemen all the time, and we was the models of the league—swell dressers, too. We all had

our shirts made to order, and every one wore silk socks. There was class to us. In two seasons only one hotel asked us to get out, and that was because of a fresh clerk who came up and tried to stop the quartet from practicing one morning about two o'clock. It was Sunday morning, too, and we didn't play no Sunday games in the East. What do you think of a fresh guy like that? I don't blame Dan for busting him on the jaw.

That was some quartet! There was old "Jowls" Scanlan, our left fielder, who was the lead, and big "Mutt" Overton, the first baseman, was bass, and "Pipes" Kincaid sang tenor, and that season "Scrappy" Dan Davis, our shortstop, filled in. Them fellows certainly made music. Why on a quiet evening you could hear them a block from the hotel. I've listened to a lot of quartets, but when those four busted loose on something sentimental like "Tell Mother That You Seen Me and I Was Looking Well" it would make the tears roll down your cheeks. There may be better voices, but when them four got to harmonizing close, and got their heads close together and shut their eyes, and Jowls said, "Now, fellows, with expression," and they hit the chorus, they made all them John McCormacks and Al McGlucks sound like cracked pipes. I never did hear a quartet that knew so many good songs. Mutt had a friend who was a music publisher, and every time we got to New York, Mutt went down to call on him and brought back a whole armload of swell music, and they practiced sometimes half the night. Sometimes they wasn't very good on the verses, but say, how they could harmonize on the choruses!

There we was—up there near the top, battling for that old flag—living just like one happy family, no one grouchy, no one sore on nobody. Why, say, on that team a batter could miss a hit-and-run signal and let the base runner get caught so far he was shown up, and the base runner wouldn't say a word, except maybe to say: "You big, blind bonehead, why don't you get a nut sundae for a brain!" or something like that. We never had no trouble, and Slough was getting fat because his job of managing was so easy. Then along comes me, old Mike, all innocent, towing that Jimmy Hicks into the club. It was just like dropping a basket of snakes down on Adam and Eve.

We needed some one, because "Bighead" Martin, our second baseman, had busted a leg. Hicks jumped right out there the minute he got into the spangles, and he commenced touching them on the spikes when they slid and riding on top of them until he caught the ball, and he was cracking that old tangarine on the nose. There never was any doubt but that he would make good as a second baseman. Slough was crazy about him, and so were the rest of us, because we knew we never could win that pennant with Bighead playing on one leg, and this kid was a better second baseman the day he started in the big show than Bighead ever was, which is saying a lot. It ain't often you pick up a nice young fellow who can hit and run and throw and who can play the game and isn't all swelled on himself, and I was figuring on hinting to the boss that a bit more coin would be about right when things began to happen.

I wasn't the least bit suspicious of Hicks, and never imagined that he was a trouble hound. He hadn't shown a symptom. Me and him roomed together during the series at Boston, and I'd have laid ten to one he would start anything, although I knew from the way he rode on base runners who slid at him spikes first that it wouldn't do to press him too hard. He played all through that Boston series as quiet and gentlemanly as if he had come from the rolling mills instead of from a big college. Some of our gang refused to believe he was a college man he was so quiet and gentlemanly, and they said they was going to ask Ed Ruelbach about it the next time they saw him.

We got on the train to go West from Boston without any idea that anything was about to break loose. We had grabbed three out of four games from

them Red Sox, and that's going some at any time, and we were within two games of the lead. We had plugged up that hole at second base, and we knew if we got back onto our own grounds for a long stay and an even break on the umping, they might as well let us start cutting up that world's series coin. Nothing would stop us but bubonic plague or a train wreck. We certainly was happy, not suspecting that misfortune was laying in wait for us in disguise, like that moving picture we seen the other night.

As soon as we got through fighting about whose turn it was to sleep in the uppers, we settled down for the trip. The quartet got together in one berth and commenced warming up, them chess nuts got busy with their fool game, and, seeing that Slough was in a good humor, I got the chips out of my grip, rattled them, and had a six-handed game going in about two minutes.

It was just as peaceful and homelike as anything you ever saw—Slough and old Beany and some of them newspaper guys drinking beer out of bottles, the poker chips rattling musically, them chess nuts frowning and looking worried, but not disturbing any one, and the quartet going better and better every song they tried. I always like to play poker when there is music. It gets some fellows to humming and takes their minds off the cards, and whenever I feel one of them keeping time with his foot or humming the tune I know how to bet. I've made two treys beat a pat straight at them times.

Jimmy Hicks was sitting in his berth, right back of the quartet, his legs stretched across to the other seat, and he was reading and not seeming to pay any attention. The quartet was singing an awfully pretty, sentimental piece about Jesse James. It tells all about Jesse and Frank and what they done and their kindness to the poor and their bravery. The quartet had sung ten or twelve verses, and was getting down to the tender part of the song, and they was singing with lots of feeling and expression the verse that runs something like this:

"Jesse James he had a wife
She mourned all her life
The children, they was all brave
Oh, the dirty little coward, who they thought
was Patsy Howard
He laid Jesse James in his grave."

It was awful touching the way they sung it, with feeling and their voices trembling, and just as they finished the verse, holding the last note a long time, Jimmy Hicks lays back his head and sings:

"And the po-o-ore working girl hadn't any."

The quartet was pretty sore, being interrupted that way in the best part, but they went right ahead and sang another verse, the one about Jesse's funeral, and before they finished the last sad note Hicks started again:

"And the po-o-ore working girl hadn't any."

Mutt is pretty sore. He wants to get up and take a punch at Hicks' jaw, but the others tell him not to pay any attention, and they starts in on "Good-by, mother, mother, you may never, never clasp me to your heart again." The way they sung that was enough to make a fellow cry almost, and I guess they were trying to shame Hicks for butting in, but just as they finished the first chorus, Hicks starts his:

"And the po-o-ore working girl hadn't any."

That finished big Mutt. He went over the back of the seat with two or three fellows hanging onto him, trying to keep him from busting Hicks on the jaw. It was the first real fight we'd had in a week, and every one was interested, and some idiot jumped up and knocked all my chips on the floor and there were two red ones I never did find. Slough got in between Mutt and Hicks, and stopped it.

"You fresh busher, what do you mean by spoiling our harmony?" asked Mutt, trying to get at him. "Ain't you got no appreciation of music?"

"Music?" says Hicks. "Is that what it was? I wasn't trying to spoil it; I was trying to help it out."

"Keep your damned ki-oodling out of our quartet," said Pipes, who was sore, because "Good-by, mother, mother" is one of his best pieces.

"You guys don't know anything about music," says Hicks. "All real up-to-date quartets has five in them. I was trying to add class."

"They ought to have a class in manners at that college you went to," says Scrappy Dan. "You act like no one ever learned you no etiquette."

"I can sing any time I want to," says Hicks. "I have a good ear for music, even if I can't sing much."

"Sing all you want to," says Mutt, "but go outside to do it, and keep them damned working girls out of our quartet."

"It's a good song," says Hicks. "I like it, and I'm going to sing it whenever I want to."

"I warn you not to spoil our harmony again," says Mutt.

"No one can't spoil that," says Hicks. "It's rotten now."

We got them all quieted down, and the quartet went back to their berth and tried it over again. It took them some time to get started right, because Hicks had spoiled their teamwork, but after a time they got going on an awfully sad piece that goes something like this: "Bury me down in the meadow where the vi'lets bloom in spring." Just as they puts their heads together, shut their eyes, and harmonized on that last long, sad note, Jimmy Hicks joined in and sang:

"And the po-o-ore working girl hadn't any-y-y."

He was still holding that "y" when three of them landed on him at once.

Say, I've seen some lively mix-ups, but that was one of the best I ever see.

It was the first time we ever had seen Hicks in action, and he was as good a battler as he was a ball player. They battled all the way from Lower 5 to the gents' smoking room. Only one or two could get at him at a time, and he was wrecking the berths with them while retreating. They backed him up against the partition and got at him, and it took Slough and four or five others to pull them off. Hicks was buried under them, his nose was bleeding, and one of his eyes was in mourning, but counting up the wounded on the other side made him look like the winner. As soon as he got onto his feet he backed up into a berth and sang:

"And the po-o-ore working girl hadn't any."

They was starting again, but Slough stopped them and made them all go to bed. Hicks had an upper berth, and half an hour after things quieted down he stuck his head out from between the curtains and sang that poor working girl again.

That was all for that night. Slough was pretty sore, and he broke up the poker game with me two dollars the loser.

There wasn't much doing the next morning, only the harmony was ebbing out of that ball club. During the afternoon the quartet got together again, but Hicks never even let them get warmed up. He joined in the chorus of the first song they tried, only instead of using the words, he sang: "And the poor working girl hadn't any."

There wasn't any delay about the fight starting that time. Hicks battled the whole quartet, but they finally got him down and shoved his head under a berth and tried to make him promise not to do again. He wouldn't promise. They threatened and told him what they'd do if he disturbed them again, but it didn't do any good. Mutt thought they would sing something that he'd be ashamed to butt into, and he started: "Don't let mother know that I have fell." It is awful sentimental; all about a poor girl in a great city, surrounded by all sorts of temptations, who loves not wisely but too well, as the song says, and is afraid her maw will find out that she has quit her job in the laundry. But the sentiment of it didn't even make a dent in Hicks. He joined in at the finish and sang:

"And the po-o-ore working girl hadn't any."

It would have been funny—the way he sung them same words to any tune

they was singing if it hadn't been for spoiling a tender song like that. The quartet jumped him again, and beat him up until Slough cut in and told them he'd lick the whole bunch and take some of their money besides if he heard any of them singing anything again that day. Slough never did have any sentiment, and he didn't appreciate music like the rest of us.

Inside of a week there was about as much harmony in that ball club as there is in a deadlocked jury room. Those fellows couldn't make Jimmy quit singing about that poor working girl. I tried to argue with him, and told him that music has power to soothe the savage breast, like the poet said, but he said music of that kind was what made them savage in the first place. After a day or two the quartet got discouraged, and didn't sing often. Hicks insisted on singing about that poor working girl, and Slough wouldn't let them beat him up any more because he was afraid of crippling a second baseman.

"It ain't any use to beat him up, anyhow," Slough tells them. "You can't lick him."

"Can't lick him, huh?" says Mutt. "I can lick that fresh busher with one hand."

"Naw, you can't," says Slough. "You can knock a guy like that cold, but never lick him. You've got to find some other way of stopping him."

The way things was going made me change my mind about asking the boss for more coin. It looked as if Hicks wasn't the find we had thought, and I decided not to mention discovering him —at least not while Slough was around. We needed that pennant, and our chances was going glimmering. All the harmony was oozing out of the team as well as the quartet. Everybody was getting peevish and bawling each other out, and we started losing games and blaming it on each other. I didn't suspect even then that Hicks was the starter, that he just naturally started trouble because he liked it, until I was in the clubhouse one morning during practice, putting some things in my locker, and Hicks and Mutt were in there, snarling at each other like a pair of brindle bull pups.

"Whyinell are you always trying to bust up our quartet?" says Mutt, who was as proud of his voice as he was of his batting average.

"Me?" says Hicks, as if he was surprised. "I wasn' trying to bust up the quartet. If you fellows had any sense, you might have a real quartet instead of that bunch of barber-shop bums."

"I suppose you think you can sing better than we can?" says Mutt.

"Nothing like that, Mutt," says Jimmy, real sadlike. "I know my voice is gone. I used to be a swell singer. I was a boy soprano, and my folks started to educate me for opera, but when my voice changed it was no good. All my musical education was wasted."

"That's tough," says Mutt, who was tender-hearted and ready to cry whenever he heard anything sad. "Maybe that's why you hate music?"

"Me hate music?" asks Jimmy. "Why, Mutt, I love it; I eat it up."

"Then why are you always butting in and spoiling it?" asks Mutt.

"I'll tell you, Mutt," says Hicks confidentially, "your voice is all right. It it fine. I've always liked it. It's got timbre and quality, and you know how to use it to get the effects. That's what gets me sore, hearing those fellows, especially Pipes, spoiling it for you."

"That's right," says Mutt. "Pipes always hits them high notes too strong, just when I'm getting expression into them. I've told him about it a hundred times."

"It spoils a good voice to sing with bums that don't know anything about music," says Hicks. "You ought to take better care of your voice. With that voice you ought to be doing solo work."

"I'm pretty good on 'Larboard Watch, Ahoy!'" says Mutt. "I sung that grand out at the home-talent show at home last winter."

We was jumping to St. Louis that night, and the quartet got together and started again. It was the first time they ever had to beg Mutt to join. As

soon as they sung the first verse, Hicks butts in with the poor working girl, and they jumped onto him again. I noticed that Mutt didn't take any part in the argument, and when they got quieted down and wanted to start over again Mutt said he didn't believe he'd sing any more that night, his throat was a little sore, and that broke up the quartet for the evening.

Going out to the St. Louis park the next day, I climbs onto a Cass Avenue car and drops into a seat right behind Hicks and Pipes, who was jawing away at each other, and pretty soon I heard Pipes say:

"Maybe you think you're good enough to break into our quartet?"

I expected Hicks to get back at him, but instead he looked sad, and sprung the same story on him he had on Mutt —all about the boy soprano and the musical education and losing his voice. Pretty soon I heard Pipes say:

"I never knew you knew music. I thought you was just being fresh. What do you think of our quartet, anyhow? Pretty fair, eh?"

"Bad, Pipes," said Hicks seriously. "That is, from a real musician's standpoint. You have the only really good voice in it. You've got the finish and you understand expression, but the rest of them are bad, especially Mutt."

"That big hunk of cheese bellows like a bull on the low notes," says Pipes. "He spoils the effect of my voice. I'm glad you noticed it."

Then I saw what that little old trouble starter was doing. He was telling each one of them how good he was and how bad the others were, and they all were agreeing with him. It wasn't a week until you couldn't get any one of them four to sing with any of the others. Harmony? We had about as much harmony as there is in the convalescent ward of a pesthouse.

Slough was worrying, and dropping two out of four games to the Browns didn't cure him. He was looking for the cause, because he knew that we were losing by fighting among ourselves. We were jumping east from St. Louis to open in Philly. It's a long jump and a hard one, and when we got through the tunnel Hicks had gone back to the smoking campartment, and old Jowls, who always was a peacemaker, says:

"Come on, fellows, let's harmonize."

"Nothing doing!" says Mutt, who had a busted finger and was dinging it in a lemon to draw the soreness. "I ain't going to ruin my voice singing with a bunch of bums like you."

"It would be a shame to spoil a voice like yours," says Pipes. "If I had it, I'd quit playing ball and peddle fish."

"You sing like a pump that needs grease," says Mutt. "We've got a windmill out home that keeps me in mind of you all winter."

"You two bums make me sick," says Dan, "talking about each other's voices when neither of you can harmonize any better than a flock of jaybirds."

"Where do you get off, talking about voices?" says Jowls. "I've been trying to learn you something about music, but I'm done ruining my voice."

"Who ever told you you could sing?" asks Dan, ready to fight them all.

"Hicks did," yells Jowls. "He knows music. He used to be the best boy soprano in the world; and he's educated in music. He says my voice is the only one in the quartet."

"Hicks told you that?"

"Hicks said you——"

"Hicks said——"

All three of them guys spoke at once, and then stopped, and all four of them sat there and looked at each other. Then Mutt says:

"Let's go kill that guy."

"It ain't any use beating him to death," says Jowls. "He's hopeless."

"What do you think of him, knocking our quartet like that?" says Pipes. "I knew he was wrong about you fellows' voices."

"Say, fellows," said Jowls, after they had held an indignation meeting for five minutes, "I've got an idea. Slough said we'd have to get him some other way, and I think I know how. Listen——"

For the next five minutes Jowls did all the talking, and the quartet went to

bed grinning and all friends again. They didn't even get sore when Hicks stuck his head out of the berth and sang: "And the po-o-re working girl hadn't any."

We was playing them Athletics, and them was the days a fellow kissed his shins good-by before he went onto the field, expecting one or two of his legs to be torn off by batted balls. Hit? Say, when Al Orth was pitching and Bill Douglass at first and Eddie McFarland catching, they had nine three hundred hitters playing at once. Ed Delehanty was manager, and he only had one signal, and that was "Hit it." Hicks never had played against them guys before, and we didn't even tell him to put on shin guards or tip him off that Morgan Murphy was up in the clubhouse tipping off signals, and that every batter knew every ball that was pitched before it was pitched.

Pipes was pitching, and there wasn't anything doing in the first inning. In the second Monte Cross hit one straight at Hicks so fast that it looked like a wireless message going to Atlantic City. The ball just scorched the grass in two spots, then hit Hicks on the shins and caromed against the right-field wall. Hicks was hopping around on one leg, wondering whether the other still was attached to him or had gone on with the ball, when the quartet came running from all directions, lined up in front of second base, put their arms around each other, laid back their heads, and sang:

"And the po-o-ore working girl hadn't any."

Hicks quit rubbing his sore shin, grabbed his glove, and limped back to his position. The crowd was wondering what was coming off, and old Bob, the umps, was trying to make them quit, but they held the final note a minute and a half.

I see in a minute what was coming off. Pipes was pitching outside to the right-handed hitters so they'd hit at Hicks. Del came up, and Pipes handed him a fast one six inches outside the plate. I heard the bat crack, and the next thing I see that ball smashed through Hicks' hands, hit him right on the Adam's apple, and went on away from there as if it hadn't been molested. Hicks was gaping like a chicken and trying to get his breath when the quartet lined up behind him and obliged with the poor working girl. Some of the fans in the front rows joined in.

It was a shame the way they rubbed it in. Pipes just handed up the ball for them to hit, and most of them hit right at Hicks. The way they bombarded him was awful, and every time a ball shot off his shins or almost carried away his hands the quartet sang, and more and more of the fans joined in. By the fifth inning Hicks was so rattled he couldn't have stuck both hands in a barrel of glue and picked up a five-dollar note.

Hicks was game. He stuck it out, but he was licked. He had been Wild Bill, but before the ninth inning he was Tame William.

"Lay off, you guys!" he said on the bench. "I'm done. I don't ever want to hear about a working girl again."

"That's a corking good song," says Pipes. "If that boy-soprano voice of yours hadn't cracked you might help us with the harmony."

"You've got to admit we've got good voices," says Mutt.

"Best I ever heard," says Hicks. "I'll clap my hands every time you ever sing after this."

That night the quartet was standing in the hotel lobby, tickled to death over getting even with Hicks, when he came limping out of the dining room with a bandage around his neck, where Del's liner hit him. He walks right up to them, puts one arm around Mutt's shoulder and one around Pipes', and says:

"Now, fellows, a little close harmony."

He struck the note, and all five of them stuck their heads together, closed their eyes, and sang:

"And the po-o-ore working girl hadn't any-y-y——"

They held the final note a minute and a half, and I knew harmony had been restored.

The Green Scarf

By Howard Vincent O'Brien

An unusual story of a young man who deliberately chooses to begin at the bottom of business, though he might have started in near the top. **Wealth and social station have no lure for him. For him, the game of life** in all its ups and downs is the greatest of all human experiences. Tommy Cass is certainly a fellow worth knowing, and the working out of his destiny proves a remarkable series of exploits.

(*A Four-Part Story—Part One*)

CHAPTER I.

IT was after four o'clock in the morning. The last function of commencement was over. Diplomas had been issued, and the class of 1914 was among the "grads." In the old vine-clad hall on College Street the Keys crowd were holding their last meeting. They sprawled about, collars discarded, shirts open at the throat, staring glumly into space. The atmosphere was vaguely tearful.

Pete Culver roused himself with a yawn. "Well, I s'pose triennial will see us comin' back in our private cars," he suggested.

"All but Cass," growled Big Bill Burton. "Good Lord, Tommy, what an ass you are! If *my* dad could ease me into a nice soft job, you can bet I wouldn't hesitate."

The others echoed agreement. All except "Pop" Farr—chronic in dissent. "You don't understand Tom," he drawled, rolling his eyes behind their big horn spectacles. "You're not educated enough to understand him. The trouble with you fellows is you think you're all through with life. Tom knows he's not. He hasn't got his green scarf yet."

"What d'ye mean—green scarf?" demanded "Egghead" Noyes.

Farr's eyes twinkled behind the thick lenses. Nothing pleased him like an opportunity to display erudition. "True believers, otherwise Mohammedans, are privileged to wear a green scarf on completion of a pilgrimage to Mecca," he explained.

"And what's that stuff got to do with us—and Tommy?"

"Simply that you think your precious sheepskin's a reg'lar whopper of a green scarf—and Tom doesn't. You fellows may come back to reunion in private cars, but Tom wants to come back in something better." With a wave of the hand, expressive of finality, Pop busied himself opening a fresh bottle of beer. He felt that he had spoken wise words.

Their object, Tommy—from now on Thomas Elgin Cass, second—sat thoughtfully silent, his hands clasped over his knees.

He wasn't sure that he understood Pop's talk about the green scarf; Pop was always getting off things that sounded better than they were. Still, that green-scarf stuff was interesting—even a little ominous perhaps. There were perils, doubtless, on the road to Mecca.

With a sigh, he gazed around the room, scene of so many happy hours. It was all over now. One must—what had prexy said?—"put aside childish

things." He was a *man* now. On the morrow—no, by Jiminy, this very day! —he must fare forth to struggle with the world.

An observer with just a little imagination would have found validity in the figure. There was a singular paladin quality about the lad, a certain knightliness in the clear candor of his blue eyes, the mild resoluteness of his lips, the thrust of his head, oddly suggestive of a gaze that saw above the heads of other men.

Tommy was not in the least conscious of any elevation. That was his charm. He was no more aware of his ideals than of his lungs. He merely used them without speculation upon their quality. He found them adequate. Life to him was not complex. One hesitated occasionally, to be sure, questioning right and wrong; there were dubious gray borderlands where one found bewilderment—sometimes even a little pain. But there were always bridges.

Pop Farr, who read Kant rather keenly for his years, puzzled Tommy by calling him a footnote to the categorical imperative. Tommy merely shied a book, and went on living. To be square and honest and clean, to keep one's body like a fine weapon, above all, to put oneself in the other fellow's shoes—these were imperatives enough. And behind this instinct to be decent was a cold obstinacy, a kind of steel core in a shaft of alabaster.

There was no self-awareness about Tommy. It was characteristic that he should be amazed when his class voted him "most to be respected." He was scarcely conscious of the exquisite muscularity that had brought him his "Y." He was much less conscious of the forces in his soul that made him admired. There were poor boys about him; he had not hesitated or reasoned a moment in refusing a birthday gift of an automobile for himself. He was conscious of no particular virtue in the abnegation. It was merely his nature to act out his instincts when they were "decent"—that was a favorite word of his—and to repress them when they were not. When Pop told him the quality was rare he merely laughed. It was his unshakable conviction that the rest of the world was exactly like himself.

Tommy's first step in college struck a key from which there had been no discords thereafter. He had come down from Andover with a reputation and a liberal allowance in one hand, and in the other a profound faith that the glory of Yale lay in her democracy. Therefore, against the clamor of his friends, he had taken a room in Pierson, the habitat of the poor and undistinguished. It troubled his simple heart that his friends, despite their hearty accord with his theory, yet went to the electric lights and elevator of Garland's nevertheless. It was only across the street, they told him. But it was more than a street that separated them, though Tommy never suspected it.

His thoughts, as he stared at the old fireplace before which so many generations of youth had sat and dreamed, went back to that decision of four years past. It was rather curious, he thought, that he had to face something similar now. Once more fate put the question. Would he stand on his own feet—or lean? Leaning, something told him, was not "decent." Leaning was for the crippled in spirit. It was like lying abed of a morning. There was a strain in Tommy that made him afraid of comfort.

A flush of rose suddenly touched his head like a halo.

"Good Lord!" cried the Egghead, stumbling to his feet. "It's daylight!"

Farr stretched his arms. "Turn down an empty glass," he murmured softly.

"I—I——" Culver swallowed hard. "Let's t-try——" He made an effort to speak. Then he threw himself on the lounge, burying his face in the pillows. His shoulders shook.

Nothing more was said. The few who could even approximate speech felt the utter banality of words too keenly. The others could only wink rapidly and feel absurdly ashamed of the emo-

tion that gripped them. To all of those boys, sitting soberly in the gradually softening shadows, it was a moment of exquisite sadness. To one who has not experienced the poignancy of that moment, when lives which have grown together like the roots of young trees planted side by side are abruptly torn asunder, perhaps forever, the pain of it may seem a little foolish, even a little droll. But to one who has experienced it, who has gone at last through that agony of formal handshaking, of trying to speak against the welling of unmanly tears, of sobbing, labored jests, it must always remain as very precious among sweet memories.

Tommy and Pop went back to their rooms together. They talked little—scattered phrases, not listened to; about the heat, the chances of the team next fall, and suchlike, calculated in irrelevance.

They held each other's hands a long time before they parted in the hall. Two big tears welled up behind the spectacles of Farr, the unemotional, and rolled down his lean cheeks.

"I—I s'pose to-morrow I'll think you're as big an ass as the next fellow, Tommy," he sniffed. "But to-night ——"

Tommy's clock went off at six-thirty as usual. And, equally as usual, he took his jog around the cemetery. That had been part of his morning routine since the day he discovered how disagreeable it was.

As he stood rubbing himself down after his shower, he began to suffer the assaults of doubt. He was to meet his family at breakfast, and there, he had resolved, he was to tell them his plans for the future.

For the first time he thought of possible unpleasantness. It had not occurred to him before that his father might be disappointed. The old gentleman was hard-headed; he might find his son's notion unsound, a trifle ridiculous perhaps. And his mother! A vague disquiet came over him. He did hope she'd understand.

He walked slowly over to the Taft, planning his method of attack. His mother would be sure to be hurt; that made him timid.

The grapefruit passed with trivialities. The eggs came and went without his broaching what was on his mind. Then Marion, his sister, gave him an opening.

"I suppose you'll come straight home," she said. "Della Rossiter's going to be there. And Pete and——"

"No," said Tommy, staring at his plate, "I'm not coming straight home."

A quizzical smile twinkled in his father's eyes. "You're not going to work?" There was irony in the tone, unconcealed.

"Yes," said Tommy, reddening almost guiltily. "I am."

His mother showed her surprise. "But, Tom—no vacation at all?"

"No, mother. I'm going to start right away."

His father coughed. His question was put indifferently. "Made up your mind to anything, son?"

"Yes, sir."

"The bank, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Cass' eyebrows elevated. "Prefer the ore business, eh?"

"No, sir." Tommy pushed back his chair. He realized that the time had come to be definite. "The fact is, I —I've got a job."

"You've got *what?*" His mother was frankly incredulous.

"A job, mother. Ten dollars a week to start. I'll——"

Marion opened her lips to interrupt, but her father motioned her to silence. He had leaned forward, studying his son through narrowed lids.

"Who got it for you, son?" he asked gently.

Tommy felt vaguely ashamed of himself. It made him stammer: "N-n-nobody, sir. There was an ad in the *Weekly*. I—I wrote. The man was in New York Tuesday. I—I saw him. Burroughs is his name; John W. Burroughs."

"The business?"

"Paints and that sort of thing.

Pretty good concern, I guess. It's in Chicago."

"But, Tom, dear," broke in his mother, "if you liked the paint business, your father could have gotten you a position with Sherwin Williams—right in Cleveland. Couldn't you, Will?"

"Easily," said her husband.

"You don't understand, mother," explained Tommy patiently. "It isn't that I'm particularly crazy about the paint business. It—it was the advertising angle. There's a big field in advertising. This offered a chance——"

"But even advertising. You could have gotten into that—right in Cleveland, too. Why, your Uncle Albert ——"

"Yes, of course. But, you see, this puts me on my own hook. I'm twenty-one now, you know. Father an' you an' Uncle Albert an'—oh, everybody's been taking care of me now long enough. I want a crack at taking care of myself."

"What do you know of this Mr.—Mr.——"

"Burroughs; John W. Burroughs."

"Yes, Mr. Burroughs. What do you know about him?"

"Nothing much. About thirty-six, I'd say. Snappy talker, with a cold gray eye that goes right through a fellow."

"Don't you know anything more than the color of his eyes?"

"No, mother. *He* was asking the questions—I wasn't."

"And you mean—you'll live in Chicago?"

"Yes, mother."

"On ten dollars a week? It isn't possible!"

"Lots of people do."

"But won't you come home first—just for a visit?"

"I promised to take the five-thirty out of New York to-night."

He heard his mother say something in expostulation, but his attention was fixed on his father. Mr. Cass was studying him with an expression difficult to fathom.

"Well, what do you think of it, father?" he ventured presently.

The reply was brief, almost meaningless, uttered with eyes averted. "I—I hope you'll keep me posted, son."

Tommy could not decide whether his father was pleased or not.

Tommy's thoughts were turbulent as he sat alone in the smoking compartment that night, listening to the rhythmic pound of the wheels on the track.

He was speeding into the darkness of a world unknown. It amused him to picture himself as a knight of romance, faring forth to slaughter dragons. Only the exact nature of the dragons was exceedingly vague. And he was dubious about his weapons. He was a bonehead at figures—knew nothing at all about bookkeeping, compound interest, fractions. Gee! He wished he'd taken one of those business courses downtown, or studied a little more in general. How could he *earn* ten dollars a week?

His thoughts took a larger range. Were there temptations out there in the darkness, the same old devils he had battled with in the already distant world of boyhood? Were there the same lures for unwary feet? And what was there in life—outside—that corresponded to the "Y" of college? What was *success*, as men spelled it? How did one know when one had achieved it?

Pop Farr's image of the green scarf recurred. Did all the faithful who set out for Mecca know what they would find at the end of their pilgrimage? And if one traveled alone, how did he know when he had reached the altar of true belief? Were there signs?

Suddenly the immensity of the undertaking came over him. He saw himself in a flash, not as a paladin, full panoplied in shining armor, but as the frightened, simple-hearted lad he was. An intolerable loneliness assailed him. The rough fraternity of his mates, the wise, tolerant understanding of his father, the gentle affection of his mother, seemed suddenly infinitely precious and necessary. The world no longer teased him in false

welcome; it was a dreary wilderness, filled with grinning shadow shapes that mocked him in his exile.

Tommy crawled into his berth that night, crushed in utter desolation, and presently he cried himself to sleep.

CHAPTER II.

The afternoon was waning. Habitations were as frequent as telegraph poles. The neat fields of Indiana had given place to the desolate loneliness of the dune country. The single track doubled, and doubled again. More tracks sprang out of nowhere. The clatter over switches and crossings was continuous.

Grass disappeared; cinders and bare earth supplanted it. Obese gas tanks, great, sprawling factories, all at loose ends, barren freight yards dotted with brooding semaphores, crowded all charm from the landscape. A dull jangle of bells in discord, the hoarse breathing of locomotives, deep, mournful whistles far away, sounded over the roar of the speeding train.

A drizzling rain was falling. Against the horizon lights began to twinkle mistily, and in the somber skies burst sudden, sulphurous meteors, lending brief majesty to the rolling smoke clouds.

The gloomy twilight settled rapidly. The flat dinginess outside became a purple blur against the car windows. The winking lamps of an electric sign flashed—and were gone. The white splendor of a "flood-lighted" tower loomed out of the gray distance, suddenly obliterated, as the limited, with a thundering growl, rolled into the train shed.

Tommy felt his heart contract. His lips twisted wryly at the acrid taste of smoke in his mouth. The foul breath of the monstrous place was already in his nostrils. He was afraid he was not going to like Chicago.

His father had wisely insisted upon his taking capital to tide him over until his weekly ten dollars began rolling in. So he hailed a taxi, after checking his trunk, and went to the Blackstone.

The quiet, unobtrusive elegance of the hotel rather surprised him. The unexpectedness of it was like entering the subdued charm of a fine old library after a climb over the back fence, with a stumbling progress through ashes and garbage cans.

That night he lay awake a long time, listening to the voices of the Mistress of the Lakes. Even the haughty walls of the Blackstone could not shut them out—the peremptory squawk of the motor horns, the soft clang of bells, the never-ending cough of locomotives on the Illinois Central, the gentle flutter of rain against the windows—behind all these the deep, murmurous rumble which had no name.

He awoke in the morning to a shining sun. For a moment he lay blinking, trying to grasp the reality of things. Then he saw the gray veil of soot on the counterpane, and he chuckled grimly. The elms, twinkling in the dew, outside the old rooms in Vanderbilt, seemed very far away. The fragrance of lilac, the soft twitter of birds—all that was of a vanished past. There were no cloistered solitudes here. This was Chicago—life!

After breakfast he summoned a taxi to take him to the office of Mr. Burroughs—1822 Diversey Parkway was the address. It was like Chicago, he told himself, to put its factories on boulevards. It was nearly an hour before he was set down in front of the tawny brick building, with the plain wooden sign at the door marked:

CHAMPION PAINT & VARNISH CO.

"I guess I should have taken a Pullman sleeper," was his sarcastic comment to the chauffeur as he paid his fare.

The latter grinned cheerfully. "Why, boy, this ain't far out. You can go north for another six miles 'fore you get out o' the city."

His words made Tommy feel physically minute. The long ride itself had somehow brought home to him the magnitude of the task he had set for himself of "making good" in this colossus of the plains.

He sighed gently, and went up the wooden steps. The girl at the telephone switchboard looked up from her crocheting long enough to accept his card, and put the official question: "Your business?"

Tommy reddened and said that he didn't know; he thought Mr. Burroughs was expecting him. The heightened color made his good looks better, and she smiled amiably.

He followed her down a passage, broken at intervals by frosted-glass doors. She halted before one, opening it for him. He thanked her with a shy little smile, which went straight to her heart, and entered. The door closed softly behind him.

Blinking, with the sudden light from the broad windows in his eyes, he looked at Mr. Burroughs, and Mr. Burroughs looked at him. The latter, however, he did not realize, for the lithe young man in the gray suit, seated at the broad desk, appeared to be intent on an examination of his fingers.

There was silence for a moment, after formal greetings had been exchanged. Then Mr. Burroughs, with a sudden movement, opened a drawer at his side and brought out a box of cigars. "Smoke?" he asked abruptly.

Tommy thanked him, at the same time taking out his own silver-mounted pigskin cigarette case. "May I have a match?"

Mr. Burroughs, staring at the glass desk pad, knocked the ash from his cigar. "I don't believe in cigarettes," he said softly.

Tommy flushed. Then he looked up, and his eyes met those of the older man squarely. "Thank you, Mr. Burroughs," he said. "I'm glad you told me."

The man in the gray suit spoke crisply: "I try to say things before—not after."

Tommy hesitated a moment; then he leaned forward and took a cigar. "I'm ready to begin," he ventured.

"Begin what?"

"Working."

"For whom?" The question was clipped off shortly.

"Why—for you." Tommy looked blank.

"Sure?"

"I—I don't think I understand ——"

"You must. Now listen." There was a subtle, restless power in the man at the desk that made Tommy think of a tightly coiled spring. "You're going to work for—Thomas Cass. To do that *successfully* requires that you work for me. Understand?"

"I—I think so."

"Enlightened self-interest, Cass."

"Yes, sir."

"You played football, I think you told me?"

"Yes, sir."

"I never went to college myself. *I've* played business instead of games. But the principle's the same. The *team* first. Get my thought?"

"Well, yes—I——"

Mr. Burroughs drummed pensively against his teeth with a pencil. "You took your degree?"

"Yes, sir."

"Think it's worth anything—in money?"

Tommy thought a moment. Then he looked up at the clear, cold gaze fixed upon him appraisingly. It made the words trembling on his tongue seem rather flabby. He decided to be candid.

"Yes, I do," he said doggedly.

"Why?" The challenge was biting.

"Because—well, it means you've gotten *through*. It isn't much; any fellow can do it, of course. But it's *something*. And if it doesn't mean you've learned anything, it does mean you've learned *how* to learn—to a certain extent, that is. And it——"

"Umn!" Mr. Burroughs sighed noncommittally, looking out of the window. "I think you'd better meet Mr. Dickinson. He'll be your immediate boss." He touched one of the many buttons at his elbow.

Tommy was crestfallen. It was obvious that his effort at frankness had failed lamentably. Next time he would know better.

His words had not been clear. Perhaps, if he qualified them—— He glanced up, and found the chill gray

eyes fixed on him again. "You've settled on living quarters?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Burroughs was uniformly surprising. He fumbled under a pile of books and brought forth a slip of paper. "Here's a list of boarding places. They're all good, I think. The rates are marked."

"Oh, thank you," stammered Tommy, marveling. "It's awfully——"

"I'd suggest you pick your class and look them over this afternoon."

Just then Mr. Dickinson came in. "In charge of advertising," explained Mr. Burroughs curtly. Tommy, acknowledging the introduction, surveyed the newcomer. He was a pallid young man, spectacled, loose-jointed, and soft of flesh, who shook hands limply. It was impossible not to contrast him with the tense alertness of Mr. Burroughs. One thought also of old Pop Farr's lazy drawl; Mr. Dickinson's wasn't lazy—it was weak.

Tommy sought instinctively to be liked. He smiled tentatively at the advertising manager. But the latter seemed not to have seen him. The rebuff Mr. Burroughs had given him was intensified. It hurt; even angered him a little. The fellows on the campus had been only too ready to return his smiles. Then he thought of that long taxi ride through street after street of teeming buildings. Who was he, anyway? These men of business were not snubbing him; they were scarcely conscious of his existence.

A gesture from the figure at the desk, and Mr. Dickinson opened the door. Tommy hesitated. But Mr. Burroughs was already immersed in a pile of papers. The inference was obvious.

"Ever done any advertising?" asked Mr. Dickinson as they made their way down a dark hallway.

Tommy's faith in frankness had been shaken, but not destroyed. "No," he said, "I'm just out of college."

"What college?"

"Yale." He was unable to prevent a faint note of pride from creeping into his voice.

Mr. Dickinson apparently was not affected by it. "Here's our quarters," he said listlessly, opening a door marked "Advertising Department." His quick glance took in a drawing table, a row of filing cases, very dusty, and a vague miscellany of papers and tattered magazines. The wall was lined with lithographs, calendars, bright-colored posters. The floor was carpetless. It was all in depressing contrast to the virile elegance of Mr. Burroughs' office, with its bare, gleaming mahogany, and the soft Persian underfoot.

There were introductions immediately. "Mr. Cass, this is Mr. Lieberstadt, our artist, and Miss Gallery."

Tommy shook hands. The artist, a red-headed youth, with a green eyeshade, torn at one edge, pushed up on his forehead, removed the half-burned cigarette which was hanging from an unshaven lip. "Glad t' meetcha," he observed, returning immediately to his work. The stenographer, a straight-sided female of advanced years, merely smiled amiably, exhibiting two rows of very bad teeth.

Tommy's thoughts were centered on the artist's cigarette. He wondered; then he felt Mr. Dickinson's hand on his elbow, and he was gently propelled toward a door marked "Private" at the end of the room. "A special cage for me and my assistant," was the explanation.

A moment later he heard himself introduced to "Miss Manard." Recollecting the ancient stenographer in the other room, he was not immediately attentive. Then his eyes opened. A girl of about his own age had risen from the big double desk, with hand outstretched.

He was not given to the observation of details—particularly feminine details. But he was acutely conscious of Miss Manard's appearance. She was not at all in key with her rather dingy surroundings. There was as much charm in her appearance as in any girl he had ever seen. The gown of soft blue silk, suggesting rather than revealing her lithe figure, with the low collar of ivory lace, was, he concluded inwardly, "a peach!"

But she was also different from all the girls he knew. There was an open frankness in her clear brown eyes that made one think of men—fellows like Pete Culver and Burton—and there was a crisp incisiveness to her voice, an alert assurance about her whole manner altogether surprising in a girl.

He couldn't just explain the distinction. Girls clung. The thought of Miss Manard clinging to anybody almost made him laugh. He decided that if she liked a fellow he'd have to be a regular chap and no mistake; if she didn't——

Mr. Dickinson unexpectedly said something that filled Tommy with a strange mixture of gratitude and apprehension. "I'm going out for a moment, Miss Manard," he said in his colorless way. "Will you explain things to Mr. Cass?"

When the door closed behind him, she went back to her desk. "I hope this litter won't set you a bad example," she said cheerfully, making a brisk pretense of tidying up.

Tommy was tongue-tied. He felt extraordinarily foolish.

"Sit down, Mr. Cass. Let's talk about things."

"Thank you." The rich timbre of her voice sounded in his ears like an organ chord. "Thank you," he repeated, and sat down. But unfortunately he was thinking of Miss Manard's complexion and *morning roses newly washed with dew* rather than of the precise location of the chair, so that he sat down, very firmly and painfully, on the floor.

The hot blood flamed up to his hair. There was a tense moment as they stared blankly at each other. "Well," he growled savagely at last, "why in thunder don't you laugh!"

She was staring at him, her eyebrows slowly rising. A faint quiver appeared around her lips, and lines deepened in the corners of her eyes. The trembling of her features became uncontrollable. Suddenly she threw herself back in her chair. "Oh, oh!" she cried. "I can't help it. I know I shouldn't, but I can't! I can't!"

Tommy, still sitting on the floor, looked at her ruefully. "Can't *what?*" he demanded irritably.

"I—I only just saw it!" She covered her hand with her hand. "Oh, look—your hat!"

He got up stiffly. "If you mean to——" he began.

"Y-you're *sitting* on it!" She choked.

He looked down at the floor behind him. Then he understood. The bright, new, expensive straw was none of those things any longer. He surveyed the wreck thoughtfully. "I seem to have spoiled my hat," he said.

"Rather!" She went off into another spasm.

He stared at her dubiously. "I—I suppose I ought to apologize," he began.

She wiped the tears from her eyes. "No need. Men *always* lose their tempers when women laugh at them."

"I *haven't* lost my temper!"

"Oh—Mr. Cass!" She collapsed in another burst of laughter.

He watched her for a moment. "Say!" he demanded suddenly, a singular grimness coming over his red features. "Maybe you'd like to know what made me do that circus stuff?"

She sobered instantly at the look in his eyes. She studied him thoughtfully. Then his unspoken message came unerringly on the wings of intuition. "No," she said slowly, "I wouldn't."

"You haven't any business to look like that," he grumbled under his breath.

She gave no evidence that she had heard him. The smile so suddenly extinguished in her eyes gave place to a cold gleam. She leaned forward over the desk, and her lips formed a straight line.

"See here, Mr. Cass," she said icily, "I think you're a nice boy, but if you and I are going to be friends you've got to find some other reason for falling over chairs than—than—— You understand, don't you?"

"Yes," said Tommy meekly. "I understand."

"All right, then. Let's get down to brass tacks."

CHAPTER III.

In that memorable interview with Mr. Burroughs in New York, Tommy had phrased his aspirations simply. He would start at the bottom, of course. All he asked was assurance that he started on a *ladder*.

Nevertheless, ten minutes of Miss Manard's discourse upon "brass tacks" engendered doubt. A suspicion of inadequacy became a consciousness of original sin. His attention wandered. He did not hear all she said. But he heard enough to be convinced that he knew nothing of real value, and unhappily skeptical that he ever would.

"The office opens at half past eight," she finished. "It closes when the work is done—usually about five-thirty. You will—are you listening to me, Mr. Cass?"

Tommy came back guiltily. "No," he admitted frankly, "I wasn't."

She studied him, biting her lip. "I don't suppose you'd care to tell me what you were thinking about?"

An engaging candor was an instinct with him. Though he flushed and stammered a little, he told the truth completely: "I—I was invited to a house party before I came out here. I—I was just thinking about it. Things are so—so different!"

"Different?"

"Rather!" He flashed a diffident smile at her before his eyes dropped. There was a boyish charm in his embarrassment, of which fortunately he was quite unconscious. "You see, I never had a girl to talk to me this way before in my life. It sounds awfully conceited to say it, but—but—well, you know, girls always—er—kind of *looked up* to—to—a fellow!"

She surveyed him quizzically for a moment. A suggestion of a twinkle hovered in her eyes. Then, with a sudden movement, she snapped the rubber band from a roll of proofs and cleared an open space among the litter of papers on her desk. "You might begin on that electro cabinet, Mr. Cass," she said evenly. "You'll find the plates numbered to correspond with the drawers."

Her gesture made Tommy feel that he had been swept to the coldest outer fringe of the solar system. "I hope you understand what I meant," he began earnestly. "I——"

Her reply was distant and definitely impersonal: "If any questions arise, Mr. Cass, don't hesitate to come to me."

"Yes—*ma'am*." Tommy had an extraordinary sense of minutesness as he backed awkwardly out of the private office.

He set diligently about the task of reestablishing order in the electro cabinet. But it was impossible to keep his thoughts from straying into unrelated bypaths. He suffered a kind of detachment, as if one part of personality stood to one side mocking the other. Memory, vociferous imp, perched on his shoulder, jeering. "Ho! ho!" it laughed. "It seems to me I recall the day when forty thousand people rose as one to cheer the mighty boot of Cass. And hordes of little boys followed him on the streets. And newspapers printed his picture. And girls——"

"Aw, shut up!" growled Tommy savagely. "Ancient history! Stone-age stuff!"

It seemed only a moment, though it was nearly an hour, before he heard Miss Manard's cool, inquiring voice: "Have you finished, Mr. Cass?"

"Ho! ho!" screamed the Imp deliriously. "My eye, how she treats the great Cass! Everybody in the office is laughing at you, Tommy."

Tommy let fly instinctively at the pest on his shoulder, and succeeded only in imprinting a great smudge of soot on his crimson cheek. "Let 'em laugh," he gritted through his teeth. "It's their turn now!" To Miss Manard he merely said quietly: "Not yet."

Despite the difficulty in concentration, due to the incessant ridicule of the Imp at his ear, he persevered doggedly, and shortly before noon the task was completed.

He went in at once to report to Miss

Manard. "It's all done," he said briskly.

She went out to look. He watched her as she went rapidly through the drawers. Presently she glanced up at him, a curious expression in her clear eyes. "To-morrow, Mr. Cass," she said in an undertone, but distinctly, "you can do it over. You've mixed electros and originals. Electros have a copper shell on a lead base—see, like this." Her long fingers held up one of the engravings for his inspection. Lithe, graceful fingers—— "Do try and remember that next time."

Before he could speak, she had gone back to her room. "Ho! ho!" roared the Imp. "Flunked on the first trial! Oh, Tommy—if you could only see your face!"

The noon whistle sounded gratefully after a morning under Miss Manard. Tommy lost no time in putting on his coat and slipping out to the wash room. And he did not dally in cleaning up. He could not bear to face any one just then.

His departure from the building was almost a flight. Gusts of black rage alternated with fierce resolves to cast himself into the lake. A fine start, indeed! Recollection of his bright confidence of success made him writhe with shame. The green scarf—ugh!

He had but one thought—to put as many miles as possible between him and the scene of his humiliation. Thus inspired, he took the first car which presented itself, and threw himself back in a seat to glower at life and curse Mr. Burroughs and Miss Manard and himself impartially to shriveled cinders. Then presently he awoke to a realization that he was an hour's ride from his destination and rapidly making it longer.

"No use being a big fool just because you're a small one," said the Imp sensibly. Rather shamefaced, he took out the list of boarding houses Mr. Burroughs had given him. The aid of the conductor was enlisted, and, in consequence, by five o'clock, he was officially the occupant of a small, dark, but reasonably clean room on West Fullerton Avenue, having paid a week's rent in advance and sent for his trunk and bag.

This matter of abode settled, he recalled that under the stress of wrath and humiliation he had forgotten his luncheon. So, at the unseemly hour of half past five, he sat down before the white-enameled counter of a very inexpensive restaurant and consumed a pot of nourishing, filling, and, on the whole, savory baked beans. It occurred to him that his breakfast had cost exactly five times as much as his dinner, and that made him realize what a lifetime of experience had intervened between the two meals. As he washed down the bitter recollections of the day in a long draft from the massive glass, he decided that he had never been so lonely and generally unhappy in his whole life.

An eloquent wish broke from his lips. By jingo, he'd like to make Miss Manard *cry!*

He rose early next morning, and was inside the doors of the Champion Paint and Varnish Company by eight o'clock. The result was that when Miss Manard arrived he was able to greet her with the announcement—triumph not wholly concealed—that the electro cabinet had had its second renovation and was ready for inspection.

She went through the drawers rapidly, as before. Her comment was brief, but satisfying. "Good work!" was all she said.

He rather expected immediate transfer to duties of graver import, but apparently she had nothing for him at the moment. He was idle for an hour, until Mr. Dickinson came in.

He was sure, then, that some occupation would be forthcoming. But, beyond a faint nod of greeting, his existence continued to be ignored. Finally, after listlessly glancing through the magazines scattered about and becoming excessively bored, he resolved to make his presence felt.

"Isn't there something I can do?" he asked plaintively, when the advertising manager chanced to pass him.

Mr. Dickinson halted, looking

vaguely annoyed. "Why—er—yes, I suppose so. You might run through those scrapbooks and see what we've been getting out."

He spoke without enthusiasm, and Tommy followed his suggestion in the same spirit. It was footless work! At first he made a real effort to instill interest in the monotonous pages of proofs, but it was not long before he found himself yawning.

He looked up from one particularly cavernous gape to find Miss Manard's gaze fixed upon him intently.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, rising hastily. "I——"

Her question was whimsical: "Reading the lives of the saints?"

He sensed a faint derision, and he tried to explain. But she waved him silent. "Come into my office, won't you? Perhaps I can make it mean something."

He followed her, relieved, and yet a little apprehensive.

"Sit there in Mr. Dickinson's place," she said. "He's gone out."

Piling the bulky scrapbooks on the desk, he obeyed. She drew up another chair and sat down beside him—so close that a strand of her hair grazed his cheek. He was conscious of a subtle fragrance—like the freshness in the air after a thunder shower. One thought of flowers. It was very difficult to concentrate. But a glance from her serene eyes helped noticeably. It was almost as specific as a rap on the knuckles.

"Mr. Dickinson asked me to look these over," he explained apologetically.

She nodded. "Yes, of course. But it ought to be done understandingly. They're different kinds of ads, you see. Dealer, consumer, keyed, mail order, general publicity, and so on. Then copy has different purposes. Take this series, for instance. It's meant to sell *service* rather than *paint.*"

"But I don't see where Champion gets anything out of this sort of thing," protested Tommy, getting interested in spite of himself. "There's nothing but the name of the company in small type at the bottom!"

"Exactly. Looks like the loveliest altruism, doesn't it? Well, it's not. Here's the idea. Build up business in *general*—new business—and some of it's bound to come to us. It's creative advertising—the finest kind."

She went on turning the pages with a lambent sparkle of comment and elucidation. At one large proof in color, she paused. "Hello!" she cried. "There's a great ad—one of the first I ever did."

Tommy's exclamation was unforced: "It's a peach!" He really thought it was.

She leaned back in her chair and stared at him. "Why?" she demanded bluntly.

He was disconcerted by her severity. "Because—well—because——"

She interrupted him: "Because it has a pretty picture in it and reads smoothly; that's what you're going to say. Now listen to me, Mr. Cass. It happens to be one of the worst pieces of copy that ever went out of this shop."

"No!" Tommy studied the proof, genuinely amazed.

"Yes. So just put this down as Lesson I. The only thing that matters about an ad is the sales it makes. An ad isn't a work of art; it's a piece of machinery. And it isn't worth a button unless it *works.*"

Tommy had a sudden access of wisdom. "Why—why doesn't that apply to art?" he said slowly, feeling for his words. "Take books, for instance. They're *art,* aren't they?"

"Some of them."

"Well, take certain kinds of books—funny books. A funny book that isn't funny isn't any good no matter how good. I mean, I—oh, you know what I mean, don't you?"

She turned and studied him, faint lines of perplexity or astonishment between her eyes. "Why—Mr. Cass, you—you're positively profound!"

He was hurt, and showed it. "You're laughing at me!"

She looked out of the window for a moment without replying, and when she spoke it was dreamily, as if to her-

self. "Maybe art is just expression—worthless if it doesn't register; nonexistent even. That leads to droll conclusions. Perhaps these motion-study people will get after the painters and the musicians and show them the way to greatness. Efficiency's merely the shortest line between two points. Maybe we'll have finer art when artists learn that. Efficiency in morals is sincerity. Efficiency in—— But good heavens, Mr. Cass! What do you mean by wasting the firm's time on such dangerously interesting ideas? Take yourself off—*fly!*"

Tommy picked up his books and went back to his desk in the outer office, vaguely troubled with a consciousness of false pretense. He had not intended to be "interesting;" certainly not "dangerous." And as to "ideas," he was quite healthily unaware of their possession.

It was over three weeks before Tommy had another interview with Mr. Burroughs. The summons came late one afternoon, just as he was preparing to leave.

The president of the Champion Paint and Varnish Company was busy telephoning as he entered. Presently the receiver clicked on its hook, but Mr. Burroughs did not speak. Tommy waited a moment. Then he coughed discreetly. Still no sound save the scratch of a pen signing letters.

Mr. Burroughs suddenly leaned back in his chair, and brought the tips of his fingers together. "Do you know why I put you in the advertising department?" he asked abruptly.

"Why—no, sir."

"Think you're fitted for advertising?"

"I—I don't know, sir." Tommy's heart sank. There was certainly nothing very friendly in Mr. Burroughs' manner.

"Umn! Quite right. Neither do I." He leaned forward, shooting the question sharply: "Like business?"

"Yes, sir. Very much."

"Think you're fitted for it?"

"Why—yes, sir. I think so."

"So do I. That's why I put you in the advertising department. Advertising is another name for sales—and sales is the law and the prophets of business."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Burroughs' strong teeth clicked on the end of a cigar. "Going to make a change, Cass."

"Yes, sir." Tommy scarcely breathed.

"Dickinson leaves us this week. Miss Manard takes his place."

"Miss Manard?"

"Yes. Surprise you?"

"Why, no; of course not. But——"

"A remarkable woman, Cass. It isn't often that selling sense and artistic judgment are so well combined. She's done a lot for this business."

"She's been mighty nice to me!" exclaimed Tommy heartily.

Mr. Burroughs failed to take that lead. "Miss Manard," he went on phlegmatically, "has suggested you as her assistant. What do you think of it?"

"Why—I—it's awfully kind of her."

"Umn! Kind—yes. But not wise. You're not competent."

Tommy fancied that Mr. Burroughs' lip curled. A chill settled on his soul. Not competent. How it would hurt his father to hear that! And the green scarf! A sorry ending to his pilgrimage—not competent! Then he realized that Mr. Burroughs was still speaking.

"You can't *sell* without knowing your product, Cass. A few weeks in the factory wouldn't hurt you."

"No, sir."

"What's chemistry to you—just a name?"

"I—I took a course——"

"It *may* not hinder you. Kindly report in the morning to Mr. Frembach. Live chemistry for a while."

The abrupt creak of Mr. Burroughs' chair and the rustle of papers indicated that the interview was ended. Tommy stole out of the office quietly.

He was uncertain of his feelings. There was elation that his fears had been unfounded. But he was also conscious of a distinct depression. He tried to tell himself that he hated to

leave the art and science of advertising—quite abstractly—oh, *quite!* How he would miss the leaden loveliness of electros, the pungent, intoxicating odor of new-pulled proofs, the luxuriant beauty of process work! But the Imp, forever at his ear, would not be silent. "Ho!" he jeered. "There won't be any fragrance of heliotrope in the laboratory, my boy, and that shovel-jawed Frembach hasn't eyes like flakes of topaz. You're a most awful idiot, Tommy Cass! Why don't you admit it?"

He met her in the hallway, just as she was going out.

"I—I just heard," he gulped. "It's great. I—I want to congratulate you!"

The touch of her cool hand in his thrilled him astonishingly. "Thank you, Mr. Cass," she said simply, without a trace of the confusion which had overcome him. "I'm only sorry that Mr. Burroughs didn't give me *all* I wanted. I—I shall miss you."

Tommy lay awake that night, thinking about it. "She said she'd miss me," he repeated at intervals, quite foolishly, but with strange contentment.

The Imp was not at all impressed. "Of course she did, you ninny! What else *could* she have said?"

"No," insisted Tommy drowsily. "She *meant* it. I know she did."

CHAPTER IV.

Before reporting to Mr. Frembach next morning, Tommy went to his desk in the advertising department to gather up the variety of small belongings which had accumulated there. It was a dismal ceremony. Associations clung to every pen and rubber band. The sense of farewell was poignant.

He was about half through the unhappy task when he became conscious of some one standing behind him. He swung round quickly—to face the level gaze of Mr. Burroughs.

"Oh—good morning!" he stammered, a little flustered before the cool stare.

"Morning," answered Mr. Burroughs quietly. "Smoke?" He tossed a cigar on the desk. "Cleaning up, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"It's a good plan to leave things every night as if you weren't coming back again." An enigmatic smile softened the severity of the older man's features. Without further word, he passed on into Miss Manard's office.

Tommy surveyed the chaos before him in abasement. He thought hard. Mr. Burroughs' brief comment made him realize, for the first time in his life, it seemed, what a tremendous fundamental *order* was. He had thought, hitherto, of order and seemliness and arrangement as individual affairs; like the neatness of one's person. There had always been some one to pick up after him. The theory of personal responsibility suddenly overpowered him. The succinct phrases of Mr. Burroughs had a way of doing that. A single word was like a spark to a fuse; there was an instant of reflection—and then a bright flare of understanding over all manner of unrelated things. This idea of leaving one's desk at night so another fellow could use it in the morning—what was it but the Golden Rule made commonplace—and *useful?* More, it was the soft keynote to all *organization.* It was the seed from which civilization sprang.

Tommy was conscious of sudden growth; as if old fetters had snapped. Mr. Burroughs was a wonder! What a *leader*——

He attacked the situation with new zest; in ten minutes he was ready to move. The wastebasket was the gainer by his new understanding. Things which had seemed indispensable were revealed as mere cluttering obstacles to order. They went into the discard along with hampering regrets. He no longer felt that he was *leaving* the advertising department; he was merely enlarging the sphere of his experience. He went upstairs to the laboratory quite happily.

Mr. Frembach was intently stirring a vivid green liquid in a beaker when Tommy entered, and beyond a muttered invitation to "sit down," said nothing.

His appearance was at once commonplace and arresting. Age, not less than forty—probably more. Thick, graying hair, sorely in need of the shears, standing out from his head like the soft bristles of a duster. Eyes, large and faded blue. An altogether disproportionate nose. A mustache entirely obstructive. Beside the ample mouth a puckered scar suggested a chronic sneer. The general effect was hardly pleasing.

As if in emphasis, the chemist looked up, frowning. "You're Cass, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Tommy, rather dismayed by the ungraciousness of the reception. "Yes, *sir*."

"What are you going to do here?"

"Learn the first step in paint making, I guess."

Mr. Frembach's long, nervous fingers described an endless diagram in the air. "Humph! I suppose I've got to do *something* with you. Know an atom from an atomizer?"

"I—I studied chemistry in college—a little."

"That'll be helpful." The sarcasm of the comment was obvious. Mr. Frembach pulled a blackened corncob from his pocket and filled it. "Well, what do you want to do?" He spoke wearily.

Tommy looked blank. "I—I thought you'd tell me that."

The chemist stared at him, his brows contracted. Then he chuckled dryly. "All right. The crockery has to be washed. You might wash it."

He went over to a cupboard and outfitted Tommy in apron and rubber gloves. "And don't break any more than you have to," he growled.

Mr. Frembach, on closer acquaintance, remained taciturn, not to say morose, with a sharpness of tongue, when he did speak, that sometimes hurt. But at heart, Tommy soon found, was a certain rough kindliness manifested in the most unexpected ways.

"Come here!" he snapped one afternoon in the manner which usually forecasted a reprimand. "I've got some theater tickets. You can have 'em."

A thought crossed Tommy's brain. Since the exhaustion of the stake given him by his father, he had adhered strictly to his original resolve to live exclusively on his earnings. During the succeeding months consequently his pleasures had been confined to such things as ball games in the parks of a Sunday or a rarely extravagant movie. There were friends of other days in the city, to be sure, only too ready to do him honor. But it was his stubborn preference to live his life on the assumption that it was bounded, measured, and described by ten dollars a week.

This self-enforced abnegation had not been wholly pleasant. There had been moments of weakness. One smote him now. It was Friday, and pay day on the morrow. He jingled the putative coins in his empty pockets. One could economize —

"Where are they?" he asked, toying with frailty.

"In my pocket."

"I mean—parquet, balcony, or what?"

"You're a particular somebody, aren't you? Seventh row—downstairs."

"Four dollars—*umn!*" Tommy pondered for a moment. A new and daring scheme had risen to make temptation stronger. "I'll take 'em," he said suddenly. "Pay you to-morrow."

Mr. Frembach swung around. "Pay—nothing!" he growled. "D'you have to have your presents wrapped up in pink ribbon to recognize 'em?"

"I beg your pardon," murmured Tommy. "I only thought——"

"Of course. Everything in the world's got a dollar value nowadays. You can settle it in your will." Mr. Frembach shuffled away, muttering under his breath. Tommy fingered the pasteboards he had flung down.

"Really, I——" he began uncertainly.

"Oh, get out!" snarled the chemist irritably. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

During the weeks he had spent imbibing chemistry under the harsh tutelage of Mr. Frembach, Tommy had found it necessary to make occasional

descents upon the advertising department. Usually they had been visits of frank sociability, explained elaborately, in his own mind, by the singular affection he cherished for Miss Gallery and Mr. Lieberstadt. Now, however, his mission was definite, and neither the artist nor the stenographer played any part in it.

He found Miss Manard gazing pensively out of the window. When she glanced up at his entrance, he fancied he saw shadows of weariness under her eyes.

"Hard day?" he asked sympathetically. There was a mountainous heap of papers on her desk.

An unconscious sigh escaped her. "Rather! I *loathe* catalogue work. Paste—paste—paste. *Ugh!*"

"Time to quit, isn't it?"

She sighed again. "I was thinking I'd stay down to-night."

He shook his head vigorously. "I've got a better plan. How'd you like to——" The presumption of the idea suddenly halted him, appalled. "Maybe you'd think I was—oh, well—what I was going to say 's this: Will you go to the theater with me to-night?" He blurted out the proposal, blushing furiously.

She looked up at him, genuinely surprised. "Who—*me?*"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Nothing. Only I——"

A fear chilled him. "I've only got two seats," he said hesitantly. "Of course, if you want a chaperon, I could get——"

"A chaperon?" She laughed unaffectedly. "Hardly that. But truly—I ought to stay down here." She pursed her lips irresolutely.

"Oh, come on!" he urged with boyish enthusiasm. "That stuff can wait."

"It's behind schedule already. Really, I——"

The situation was eloquent of the difference in their positions. It made him lose confidence again. Nothing of importance would suffer if *he* let things slide. But she—gosh! He *had* nerve! "I—I wish you would," he muttered weakly. "I—I'd be awfully grateful." He felt like a schoolboy. He could have kicked himself for his awkwardness.

She was not, however, without intuition. She was shrewdly aware of much more than he was himself. His youthful gaucherie became, under the subtle alchemy of her imagination, a singularly affecting charm. He did not guess it, of course; perhaps fortunately. No one had ever told him of the mother that lurks in the youngest of women.

"I haven't been to the theater in ages!" she cried suddenly. "In you go!" With a quick gesture she swept the accusing pile of papers into an open drawer, and closed it with a bang.

It is, as the proverb says, but the first step which counts. Having taken it, Tommy went the rest of the route to destruction with a jauntiness that was magnificent. "We'll have dinner downtown, eh?" he tossed off carelessly. The carelessness, according to the testimony of his pulse, was largely assumed, and the flush on his cheeks was not normal.

If Miss Manard had yielded to impulse and instinct, she might have told him things which it were better for him not to hear. But being a person of natural as well as acquired discretion, she chose to hesitate a moment, as if debating conflicting imperatives. "Why, yes," she said presently, the pause having had its effect, "I think that would be very nice."

"I—I don't know Chicago very well," he faltered, when they were on the street. "Where'd you like to go? Blackstone?"

She laughed. "Let's save something to live on next week."

"Well—where else?"

"There's the——" She stopped and surveyed him in that open-eyed, frank way of hers. "I don't know you very well, Mr. Cass," she said. "Do you like music and cabarets and that sort of thing?"

Ordinarily Tommy cherished no particular dislike for such diversion. But this occasion demanded another kind of frame. "No," he declared fervently, "I hate it!"

"Well, there's a dear little place on Federal Street, behind the Union League Club. Shall we try it?"

"Lead on," cried Tommy gayly. "If it's quiet, I'm for it."

He was disposed to approve of anything appealing to her. But he found in St. Hubert's, the little restaurant tucked in between blind-eyed warehouses, a satisfying charm of its own. The silver, gleaming richly against the dull crimson of the carpet; the shaded candles; the deft perfection of the scarlet-coated waiters that made one think of yew trees and clipped hedges and the roast on the sideboard; the low-toned conversation of the other patrons, reflecting the environment, whatever the boisterousness of their inclinations; the subdued dignity of the stone walls and the rough-hewn oaken beams—both, though he guessed it not, simulacra—with the long rows of churchwarden pipes hanging from them; and finally the chop, grilled by an unsung master belowstairs—the whole an exquisite harmony in the gentle art of dining well.

"By George!" exclaimed Tommy, leaning back after a long draft from his tankard of musty ale. "Who'd think to find *this* in the dirty, noisy, vulgar mess of Chicago!"

"It's the home of surprises—Chicago is," said Miss Manard thoughtfully.

Tommy leaned forward. Presently she raised her eyes. He watched the reflections of the lights gleaming in their liquid depths. "Won't you tell me about yourself?" he asked softly. "Have you always lived here?"

She smiled at his earnestness. "No, indeed. I was raised down State. When my father died and I had to shift for myself I came up here. I did stenography first—studying decoration at the institute on the side. Then I was Mr. Burroughs' secretary for a while—until he put me in the advertising department."

"And now you're the whole works!" Tommy was unaffectedly respectful.

"Oh, hardly that!" she laughed. "Mr. Burroughs is very much behind the throne. I merely write copy and run the service end of it; he keeps close watch on policy and all that."

"He's a wonder, isn't he?"

"You think so?" Miss Manard's eyes narrowed.

"Don't you?"

"He's an extremely able man," she said slowly. "I—I owe a great deal to him." Something like a sigh escaped her. Tommy felt something unphrased behind her words. He wondered what it was. But the faint shadow which had settled momentarily over the clearness of her gaze vanished as suddenly as it had come.

"Turn about's fair," she said quickly. "Suppose you tell me about yourself. Did you come into the paint business just because it was a *job?* Or was there something more? Perhaps you studied with a special purpose in college?"

"I studied the easiest things," replied Tommy, a little sheepish.

"For instance?"

"Chinese history, international law, early English poetry, astronomy, Italian art, forestry——"

He expected her to laugh at this catalogue of futilities. But the shake of her head was oddly wistful. "I envy you," she said.

He was astonished. "Good Lord! Why? What good will that stuff ever do me?"

"None—practically. But it gives you a *background.*"

"But look at *you!*" he protested. "It'll be years before I get as far as you have—if I ever do."

She studied him soberly for a moment. "What do you think of Mr. Frembach?"

Tommy laughed—a little ruefully. "Crusty as last week's toast—but a marvel in his line."

"And Mr. Burroughs?"

"I told you."

"You envy them?"

"Why, yes—I think so."

"You needn't, Mr. Cass. You can go farther than either of those men." She paused, fingering the contents of the match safe. "They're both specialists. The world's full of specialists.

What it's going to need pretty soon are men to use and direct the specialists. Mr. Frembach puts molecules together and makes them work. Mr. Burroughs is a master at hitching up production to distribution and making dividends. But they're not enough. What's needed, Mr. Cass, are specialists in organization, men who can hitch up human beings to one another and make *them* work—toward the happiness of society. I wonder if you know what I mean?"

Tommy's frankness was a corporate part of him. "No," he said thoughtfully. "I'm quite sure I don't. Maybe I will—some day. I'm going to try."

"That's all one could ask."

He raised his eyes to hers. "You know, Miss Manard," he said abruptly, "it—it comes over me with a rush. The difference between you—and the others. They know all about what things *do*. But you—you've thought out *why*. I wish you knew old Pop Farr, a chap I used to room with. He's like that, too."

"You're also going to think about the *why* of things, I know."

"I'm going to try," he declared manfully. Then some mental safety valve released under pressure of unwonted cerebration, and his imagination focused on what his eyes could see. "If you'll help me," he added gently.

Her glance met his with a cool, humorous appraisal that abashed him. "Hadn't we better be starting for the theater?" she asked calmly.

He glanced at his watch, reddening. "By George, it's eight-fifteen now. I'll get a taxi."

She extended a restraining hand. "Don't be silly. And what is the check, please?"

He stared at her blankly. "What check?"

"The dinner. Let's see. I had a chop and coffee, and——" She opened her bag and slipped a bill toward him. "That covers mine, I think."

He leaned back in his chair, his jaw hanging. "I thought *I* was giving this party," he whispered huskily. "Come, you can't do this, you know. Really, I——"

She was already rising. "Don't you want to be friends with me?" she asked quizzically.

"Why, of course I do. But——"

"Then you must treat me like one."

"But I *invited* you ——"

"Listen, Mr. Cass!" She put her hand on his shoulder in what he felt was a distinctly matronly way. "Money's relative. Between millionaires it's negligible. But the poor don't pay each other's car fare. My dear boy, —forgive me—but I know your salary."

He protested vehemently. "But I—really, I——"

"Pure convention, Mr. Cass. And just another evidence of man's sublime egotism."

"If I had plenty of money, you wouldn't object?"

"Probably not. Perhaps at heart, but——"

"Well, I——" He halted, biting his lip. Obviously Miss Manard believed his income to be restricted to what he received from the Champion Paint and Varnish Company. Should he tell her the truth? Rather from instinct than reason, he decided not. Women were certainly odd fish, he told himself with an inward chuckle. Here was one member of the species refusing to let him pay for her dinner on grounds of "economic independence." And back in Cleveland was another—his mother —who would take to her bed in horror and chagrin did she know that her son had permitted his lady guest to foot her own score.

One might calculate the number of years between the two—but it would require a comptometer!

After the theater, on their walk through the silent streets, Miss Manard opened Tommy's spiritual eyes to a number of things which had before been but dimly comprehended, if realized at all. But he was young, and it was midsummer, and by the time they had reached the fragrant stillness of the park his normal, instinctive mas-

culinity had reasserted itself. Abstractions grew more shadowy. His intellectual attention wandered. It was not long before he failed to hear what Miss Manard was saying in a more exclusive awareness of the musical quality of her voice.

"Gee, what a moon!" was his entirely irrelevant response to one of her statements concerning the right to vote. Her perceptions were not dull, and she changed key at once.

"It's lovely, isn't it?" One more acute than himself might have detected a certain absence of enthusiasm in her tone.

"Let's go by the outer drive," he suggested. "It's not much longer."

With the intoxication of the night upon him, he was conscious of no lack of warmth in her assent. For a time they walked in silence, barring his occasionally tremulous admiration for the chiaroscuro upon the quiet waters of the lake. Ordinarily he would have been above such banality, but the silver glow from the heavens put a spell on words, even as it made magic from the commonplaces of street lamp and bench and stone walls. There was a mystery about the world, a bright, enchanting newness.

"Let's sit down," he said abruptly as they passed a bench.

She hesitated, her eyes veiled with a troubled bewilderment. "Isn't it rather late?"

"Just a minute," he urged.

She sat down on the edge of the seat, quite straight. "Not a second longer."

"You don't know how wonderful this has been," he began raptly, after a silence.

"Yes?" There was a faint note of interrogation in her voice.

"I—I've never known a girl like you. You—you're *wonderful!*"

She made a sound in her throat—not intelligible. He took it for encouragement. After all, she was not so *very* different from the other girls. Not so very. His hand stole out and found hers. "You're a wonder!" he repeated huskily.

For a moment he was timorous. Then confidence returned. She had not withdrawn her hand. It rested in his—supine—but there.

"I——" he began, and paused. She had turned, facing him. There was something in her eyes which enforced silence.

"You've been popular with girls, haven't you?" she said softly. "You understand them."

He essayed ironic denial, but the clarity of her gaze forbade. He hung his head, oddly embarrassed.

"I thought so. But haven't they all been the same kind?"

He became suddenly aware that her hand was still in his. He removed his own with a jerk, grateful that the darkness hid the agony of his blushes.

She sensed his chagrin, and she put her fingers lightly on his sleeve. "Don't misunderstand, dear boy. I'm not angry at *you.*"

"You—you're disappointed," he quavered.

"Not with you. Rather with myself. One wears a mask so long it seems real—a part of one—and then suddenly one's forced to realize it's only a mask. Don't you understand?"

"No, I don't." As always, he was bluntly honest.

"One makes one's way in the world, taking conditions and asking no quarter, and then, when it's least expected, up pops *sex.* I hate it! I hate it! Oh, Tommy Cass—why couldn't you let me be a *person?* Why did you have to remind me that I'm just a woman?" She covered her face with her hands.

"I'm awfully sorry," he murmured, humble. His bewilderment was abysmal.

"No, you're not. You're sorry because you hurt me. But you don't understand why. You *can't.*"

"Women are certainly queer," he muttered.

She flared at that. "Oh, yes—always that. But if the shoe was on the other foot? Suppose *you* were trying to amount to something in the world. Suppose you were walking along with me, talking grandly about things that mattered to you, and all of a sudden

I discovered the moon. What would you do—*man?*"

"There's a difference," muttered Tommy doggedly.

"That's what hurts so," she cried. "Men have made the world to suit themselves." Her voice suddenly became bitter. "You can't even see the ridiculousness of it. You, a mere child in experience beside me, can patronize me just because you wear trousers!"

"I'm *not* patronizing you," declared Tommy, aggrieved. "It's absurd to say so."

"But you are. You just don't like the sound of the word. It's a fact, nevertheless. I'll be worth five of you to-morrow morning. But to-night you can hold my hand and feel superior and *protective*—just because you're a man. You know it's true."

"I don't," he protested weakly.

She sighed. "The world smokes a pipe and shaves. Perhaps I'm a fool not to yield to its arrangements. Why shouldn't I set my wits to enchant some simple-minded lord of creation—when that's what he wants, anyway? Why shouldn't I? Why not let some superior creature stroke my hand for the rest of my life instead of slaving my heart out to be something you glorious creatures will never let me be if you can prevent it?"

Tommy had regained something of his composure. He grinned. "You're too good looking," he murmured.

She seized upon the phrase. "That's exactly it. If I didn't care what I looked like, you'd let me alone and be hanged to me. But I *do* care. I do! That's the pity of it. It's the curse of my sex. We *all* care!"

"I don't think I understand women," said Tommy weightily, as if the admission were serious.

Her answer was short: "It's because they're perfectly simple—and you won't admit it."

When they parted on the steps of her boarding house, she held out her hand. "You're a nice boy, Tommy," she said, smiling. "I've enjoyed the evening a lot."

He blurted out his feelings without reserve: "You make me think I'm six years old—and you sixty!"

On the way to his car, he thought about it. "She's not the kind you can flirt with. And she doesn't *want* anybody to fall in love with her.

"She called me 'Tommy.' Gosh! I couldn't any more call her 'Anne' than I could breeze up to the President of the U. S. A. and call him 'Woodie.'

"Some girl!"

CHAPTER V.

Tommy's clock failed in its duty next morning, and he was deplorably late in reaching the laboratory. There was not, however, any comment from Frembach. The chemist was engrossed in a newspaper.

"It's the beginning," he rumbled, without looking up.

Tommy peered over his shoulder at the huge, black headlines. "Of what?" he queried.

Frembach flung the newspaper from him, and clenched his fists. "It's come at last! The day! The day!"

"What's come?" Tommy was puzzled. Why should the mere assassination of an Austrian nobleman be so profoundly moving to the chemist.

The explanation came in breathless sentences: "Listen, boy. It'll be an excuse to attack Serbia. Russia's bound to intervene. That'll bring in Germany. If the kaiser mobilizes, the French will remember the lost provinces and Sedan. And then—old Albion will see her chance. Boy—the Great War is here at last!"

Tommy laughed comfortably. "Oh, come! We've had those scares before. Look at Morocco, and——"

"Preliminaries only. Testing out alliances."

"Nonsense! People don't go to war as cold-bloodedly as that. You forget that the ordinary man has more sense than he used to have. This war stuff doesn't give him a thrill any more. Why, they're reasonable beings over there. Look at the power of the socialists. They——"

"Man isn't a reasonable being—

never was," declared Mr. Frembach bluntly. "He's a bundle of instincts. Make no mistake. He *likes* to fight. He's going to."

"But he can't! Modern warfare too's expensive. Besides—it's silly!"

"Of course. So's alcohol—tobacco—life itself, if you look at it coldly."

"If there's war, who'll start it?"

"Oh, they'll say Germany, because she'll strike first, and her forty years getting ready. But it'll be spontaneous combustion, *I* think."

"Are you a German?" Tommy put the question with some awe.

"I'm a scientist—citizen of the world." Frembach laughed disagreeably. "Thus we fool ourselves. If they start climbing the Alps, I suppose I'll remember I was born a Swiss."

"Do you really think there's going to be war?"

"Positive!"

"But dukes have been murdered before and nothing come of it."

"Oh—you Americans! You might as well be on another planet for all you know of Europe. Will you ever wake up?"

"Well, I'm not going to worry till it starts."

"You won't have long to wait."

Tommy laughed. "Gee, you are a pessimist! By the way, what shall I do about that oxide? You know, the —— "

Frembach shook his head. "I—I can't think about business to-day. I think I'll go home."

Tommy followed the gaunt figure with wide-open eyes. "Well, of all the bugs!" he murmured. Then a smile formed on his lips. "Heavy case of katzenjammer prob'ly." Whistling quite cheerfully, he slipped on his blouse and went to work.

Then came that feverish week of accusation and denial, of charge and countercharge, of reverberating declarations, of amazement chilling into fear, as the gray thunderbolt, formed suddenly of apathetic farmers and dull assistant bookkeepers and simple-minded professors, hurled itself in a bloody surf on Liége, Aerschot, Namur. And almost before one quite realized the madness that had gripped the world, the German guns were growling at the gates of Paris.

Tommy, like the rest of humanity, was stunned.

One morning Tommy was asked to step down to Mr. Burroughs' office. He found the oak-paneled quarters of the president filled with strangers—oldish men, saturnine, smoking cigars grimly. In a corner he caught a glimpse of Frembach.

He guessed that the other men were directors. He wondered why *he* had been summoned. The explanation came in Mr. Burroughs' cool voice: "Sit down, Cass. We're having a little council of war over a suggestion of Frembach's. Thought you might be interested."

He nodded, wondering the more. He cast a glance at Frembach. The chemist was biting his nails; he seemed ill at ease. The president went on:

"Now, then, Mr. Frembach—if you'll restate your proposition for the benefit of the newcomers."

"Y-yes, sir." The chemist rose awkwardly. "It's the war, gentlemen. As you perhaps know, we're dependent on Germany for dyes. She isn't going to make dyes for a long time to come. It—it seems a great chance for *us* to get into the dye business."

"That's obvious." The man who spoke was rotund and florid, with a sneering mouth. Tommy took an instant dislike to him. "Why get us here to discuss that?"

Frembach's lip quivered. Burroughs came to his assistance. "The problem's rather more complicated than it looks, Mr. Gentles."

"Well—go ahead. Spill it!"

"It's not mere accident that Germany has the world's dye trade. There are several angles to it. It's partly chemical, partly industrial. That is, aside from individual scientific ability, the Germans have a far better organization than we. Furthermore, the manufacturer over there has the resources of the government behind him."

"I see. Well—what d'ye want to do,

Frembach?" Mr. Gentles spoke as if he were delivering a challenge.

The chemist looked appealingly at Mr. Burroughs, but the latter's gesture left the field to him. He began haltingly. "It's rather hard to explain——"

"Suppose you give us credit for some brains. Come on—out with it!"

"Well, sir, the fact is this: We can't make dyes because we don't know how. A good many processes are still German secrets."

Mr. Gentles looked pained. "Good grief! I thought a chemist nowadays could analyze anything."

"N-not quite," replied Frembach apologetically. "But we could do much if—if we had time."

"What d'ye mean—time?"

"That's what I'm getting at. You see, I'm so taken up with routine work that I haven't any opportunity for research. I have some ideas. I suggested to Mr. Burroughs that I be allowed to work them out."

"Yes. Go on."

Emboldened by what he took for encouragement, Frembach spoke more readily: "If I could be freed of my present duties and allowed to devote all my time to working out these ideas, I think——"

"How long would it take?" A gentleman, hitherto silent, put the question.

"That's hard to say," replied Frembach, tugging at his mustache.

Mr. Gentles took up the catechism. "Suppose we do let you go to this. What are the odds of your coming through with something worth while?"

"That's a difficult question to answer. I think—I—er—I should say the chances were—well—quite good."

"But not certain?"

"Oh, no! Not at all."

"In other words, we might make a considerable investment in your time and have nothing to show for it?"

Mr. Frembach fidgeted uncomfortably. "Yes, that *might* be the outcome, of course. But——"

"On the other hand, if you did land something big, what'd stop you from going to some one else with it?"

The query struck Tommy as gratuitously insulting. He hoped Frembach would resent it. But the chemist merely shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing but my word," he said simply.

"No offense, Frembach," growled Mr. Gentles in some compunction. "That's only business, you know. We've got to copper our bets when we can. Well, Burroughs. What do you think of the scheme?"

"I thought it of sufficient importance to justify my calling you here," replied the president quietly. It was apparent that he cherished no vast regard for Mr. Gentles.

"What do the rest of you think about it?"

Tommy found the debate which followed rather bewildering. At first he was disposed to listen closely and respectfully. Presently the disturbing truth dawned upon him that even among these neat gentlemen there was loose thinking, misinformation unrealized, even flippancy, finally a plain boredom. It was clear that they were dominated by Mr. Gentles, that they dodged responsibility in favor of Mr. Burroughs. He caught himself yawning. The president turned to him abruptly:

"Well, Cass—you understand the situation?"

"Yes, sir. I think so."

"What's your opinion?"

A sudden silence settled on the group. Tommy was abashed. "I—I don't know, sir."

"No opinion?"

The tone irritated. It awakened defiance. "No."

"You're candid, at least." The phrase was uttered bluntly. But there was a suggestion of a twinkle in the speaker's eyes. Then, with a curt nod, he indicated dismissal. Tommy left the office more interrogative than he had entered it. It was difficult to guess why he had been asked to take part, even as a listener, in the discussion.

Frembach joined him in the laboratory a few minutes later. He shuffled in wearily, dejection manifest on his

face. "You didn't give me much of a boost," he complained apathetically.

Tommy felt placed on the defensive. "I didn't have much of a chance."

"I suppose not. One can't argue with intellects like Gentles'."

"They—they turned you down?"

Frembach nodded. "Of course."

"I'm awfully sorry."

"Are you? Why?"

The question was disconcerting. "Why—I hate to see a man lose his chance."

"They'll lose more than I will," was the grim response, accompanied by a vicious clattering of glassware. "What blind stupidity!"

Tommy voiced his sympathy: "It's a darned shame!"

Frembach wheeled, and his voice trembled with anger: "No wonder the Germans talk about civilizing the rest of us. They're right. Gentles is a fine type for you! You'd have to civilize him with a club. No imagination, no foresight, no breadth. Just a fat, squealing hog for *profits*. Refuses to stake me for fear somebody else'll get the benefit. Faugh!"

"How did Burroughs feel about it?"

"On the fence—at first. Then he flopped. Thought the war couldn't last very long, anyhow. Even if I did succeed in turning up anything, the Germans would beat us on price. No imagination. No god but dividends."

Tommy felt his captain slurred. "You can't blame him for that, can you?"

"Perhaps not. That's what he's hired for. He's got to keep an eye on his bosses. My Lord—think of having Gentles for a boss! It makes a chap wish he was a German. Those fellows appreciate imagination, they do!"

"It certainly is a shame!" Tommy was thoughtful for a moment. "Strange they wouldn't risk the little you ask."

Frembach brought his fist down on the counter. "Why, Cass, they're crazy! They don't realize that dyes are going to be simply ungettable in a few months." He became quite passionate about it. "The textile makers are going to weep on our shoulders. They'll give any price asked. The field will bubble with impossible substitutes. But mark my words! The Germans didn't learn how to make dyes overnight—and neither can we!"

"Colors will be hard to get, too, won't they?"

"Sure. Chemicals of all sorts. We're going to find out what Germany means in the modern world all right. You watch."

"Do you really think the war's going to last through the summer?"

"Summer? Merciful heavens, boy, it may last five years!"

"No!"

"They thought your own rebellion was a six weeks' affair. But it wasn't. This thing's been cooking a long time. And it's going to take a long time to cool."

"Gee—you're a pessimist, Frembach."

"I'm a—oh, well, what's the use of gassing about it? Let's get back to work." A black scowl intensified the natural unloveliness of his face, but Tommy, watching him, was filled with sympathy. It was pretty hard not to be able to do what one was so keen about—particularly when it looked so sensible.

Tommy did very little work that morning, but he thought a great deal. After luncheon he went down to see Mr. Burroughs.

As was like him, he came to the point directly. "I guess it's none of my business," he began, "but I've been talking it over with Mr. Frembach, and I—well, we think it would be a good thing to lay in a big stock of raw color. You've prob'ly thought of it, but in case you hadn't I—I just thought I'd tell you. Color's going to be hard to get."

The president looked up from his desk. "Much obliged for the suggestion," he said gravely. Then a tolerant smile touched the corners of his mouth. "Frembach's a chemist, Cass. By the time we've exhausted our present stock, the war will be over."

"But he thinks it'll last five years, maybe."

"He's a chemist—not an economist.

Five years, eh? Why, my boy, it can't last five months. There isn't enough money on the planet to pay the bill. Germany's got everything against her. Money talks, you know."

"But just to be on the safe side——"

"You don't understand finance, Cass. To load up with color, on the possibility of a tight market, would be to tie up working capital unjustifiably. It would simply eat its head off."

"I guess maybe that's so. But I——"

Mr. Burroughs swung back to his desk. "Thanks again, Cass. Glad to see you're interested."

Tommy was more interested than any one knew. He went slowly back to the laboratory, his smooth young forehead wrinkled in meditation.

He recalled a talk with his father on the subject of speculation. The exact words stood in his memory. "All business is a gamble, but some is more of a gamble than others. The man who wins has to gamble, but he doesn't play the stock market—except for excitement."

There had been more. It all came to the same thing. When wisdom gambled it chose a game it knew.

The thought culminated in a question to Frembach: "Colors aren't likely to go any lower?"

"You won't be able to buy 'em at *any* price, I tell you."

"Suppose a chap bought up all the color he could get at present prices?"

"He'd double his money in six months. Or treble it."

"Humn!" Tommy was thinking of an indulgent aunt, who, on his twenty-first birthday, had passed on to him a portion of her surplus wealth. "Humn! Er—do you happen to know what Tonawanda Light and Power fours are worth?" he asked suddenly.

"Of course not. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. I was just wondering. I—er—color's likely to go up pretty fast, don't you think?"

"Fast? It's climbing every minute."

Tommy reached for his hat. "If you don't mind, I—er—I've got an engagement downtown this afternoon."

"Go ahead. I won't be lonesome."

Trying hard not to break into a run, Tommy went out. His heart was singing with suppressed excitement. He felt extraordinarily adventurous.

Downtown, he first visited the safety-deposit vaults, from his own portion of which he removed a long, fat envelope. Then he progressed upstairs to the bond department, where, striving to seem quite casual, he had a talk with the manager. There was a brisk telephoning hither and yon, and presently he made his way to the third floor, and the receiving teller. The latter's eyebrows elevated at what came over the counter to him.

His banking operations completed, Tommy sallied forth on the second phase of his plan. This proved rather more difficult than he had anticipated, due largely to the reluctance of the various persons he visited to believe that he was in earnest. But when at last he returned to his boarding house, hot and covered with dusty perspiration, he bore triumphantly in his pocket sundry documents evidencing his possession of something over two thousand dollars' worth of coloring matter, employed in the manufacture of paints.

He grinned at his reflection in the mirror. "Who'd 'a' thought you'd come to this!" he murmured.

He found Frembach intent upon the newspaper when he came in next morning. It occurred to him that this unwonted indifference to duty had become rather marked. There was a certain listlessness manifest. He yawned as Tommy came in.

"Up late last night?"

"Not particularly."

"You look tired."

"So? Well, I'm not!" He leaped to his feet with an oath. "I'm *bored*, Cass. Bored to death. The heart's gone out of things. I've got to quit reading about this confounded war. It—it—oh, hang it, it keeps me thinking!"

"It's too bad!"

"Lord—if they could only see what they'll miss! Some one else will get the jump on them sure. I met a chap with Piggott & Kunz yesterday—Joe

Wormser. They're going after the dye proposition—hard. The joke of it is, Wormser doesn't know any more about chemistry than you do." He laughed bitterly.

A small action not infrequently precipitates a vast amount of thought. Tommy's audacious plunge into speculation had awakened all sorts of mental processes. One taste of the flavor of finance intoxicated him. It made the preposterous seem quite logical.

"Why don't you go it on your own hook?" he asked calmly. "Just as I have," he was tempted to add.

Frembach scowled. "Who'd buy my bread and butter?"

"Is that the only difficulty?" Tommy spoke with the easy dignity of affluence.

"Isn't it enough?"

"Money's always to be had." The consciousness of recent achievement lent Tommy a singular confidence, reflected in the, one might almost say, grandiloquence of his manner. "What would it take?" His pencil was out and poised.

Frembach eyed him in almost comic perplexity. "What d'ye mean?"

"First—all necessary equipment furnished."

"While you're dreaming you might as well add the unnecessary, too. It don't cost any more—to dream it."

"All right—necessary *and* unnecessary. Now, then, how little could you live on?"

"A loaf of bread and a jug of wine—almost nothing."

"Well—say thirty a week?"

"Like a king!"

Tommy figured rapidly, a curiously new aspect of maturity on his boyish features. "Say fifteen hundred dollars salary, two thousand dollars equipment, incidentals, five hundred dollars—— Would four thousand dollars carry you for a year?"

Frembach licked the long ends of his mustache. "Say, what are you trying to do to me?"

"I'm being extremely practical," said Tommy earnestly. "Burroughs and the rest won't gamble on this thing, but I've come to the conclusion that they're passing up a good thing. So I think I'll gamble myself."

"Go on. This is—*marvelous!*"

"Throw up your job here, get a laboratory somewhere, and go to it. You'll have nothing on your mind, and nobody to bother you."

Frembach threw back his head and laughed tremulously. "Have you gone absolutely crazy, young fellow?"

"Not a bit. Why?"

"Who's the good fairy? You?"

"Don't worry about that, old top. The money end of it'll be taken care of all right."

The chemist sobered, and the light of suspicion flickered in his pale-blue eyes. "I may be a little touched myself," he snapped sarcastically, "but I'm not *that* big a fool."

"Who said you were?"

"Would any but a complete imbecile throw up a perfectly good job for a pipe dream like you're putting up?"

"It's no pipe dream. It's——"

"Oh, come out of it, lad!" Irritation showed in the chemist's tone. "It's all right to make fun of me, if it gives you pleasure. But enough's enough."

"I mean every word of it; I swear I do!"

"Aw—rats!" Frembach was nearing anger.

Tommy reflected. "I'll be honest with you," he said bluntly. "I haven't a cent myself."

"Oh, really?"

Ignoring the sarcasm, he went on: "But I think I can get it."

Frembach smiled, as one humors a madman. "Oh, yes, of course."

Tommy's jaw protruded aggressively. "You think I'm kidding you—but I'm not. I'm putting a straight business proposition up to you. If enough money's banked to carry you for a year—maybe longer—and you're given a contract signed by a responsible party, will you take a crack at it?"

"Will a duck swim?" answered Frembach dryly. Then he gave Tommy a shrewd scrutiny. "If you're making a monkey of me, Cass, I'll—I'll strangle you!"

"Understand, I'm not promising any-

thing. I'm merely stating a possibility."

"You're sure there's a possibility?"

"No, I'm not sure. But I think so."

Frembach took out his old pipe. "If you can put this over, Cass," he said soberly, "you'll never regret it; I swear to God you won't!"

Tommy extended his hand. "I'll put it over—or be disappointed in the best friend I've got."

With which cryptic remark he went to his desk to compose a very remarkable letter.

When Tommy's father received that letter he was so amazed that he had to go out for a walk to compose himself. Then he read it again—and laughed till the tears came. He called in the vice president and the trust officer to share his delight.

"Look at his language!" he gurgled. "Just out of college, too. The—the *nerve* of him!"

Mr. Gaunt, the trust officer, who was unexceptionably matter-of-fact, smiled incredulously. "Are you going to grant his request?"

"Egad!" roared Mr. Cass. "What else can I do? He's got me on three counts—as a charitable old gentleman fond of aiding the deserving poor, as a patron of the arts and sciences, and —and as his own *best friend*. And then he winds up with a casual remark that it's a gilt-edged investment. What d'ye make of it, Gaunt?"

The trust officer coughed in deprecation. "Really I—er—that's hardly in my line, you know. I—I really don't know what to say."

"Egad—no more do I. But the boy seems to have no doubts." He chuckled delightedly. "The young rascal! He even throws my own words up at me. He quotes me on speculation. Well, well—I suppose there's no better way to learn to use a knife than to start whittling." He pressed a button on his desk, summoning his secretary. "Miss McKee, a letter to my son——"

Tommy had to read the characteristically epigrammatic response from his father three times before its significance reached him. Then he rushed over to Frembach, waving it wildly in the air.

"He's never gone back on me yet!" he shouted.

The chemist straightened up from the steaming retort. "What's the matter now?" he demanded crossly.

"Everything's lovely!" cried Tommy exultantly. "The thing goes through."

"You mean——"

"Read it."

The old chemist took the document Tommy held out to him and read it slowly. His hand trembled. When he looked up there was something glistening in his eyes. "I—I can't believe it!" he whispered.

"Write your own contract!" cried Tommy.

The reply was characteristic: "Contract be hanged! If a rich man wants to soak you, no contract's going to stop him. I—I'll leave that to you."

"Not a word about this, Frembach —to any one."

The chemist seemed dazed. "To think I've had a millionaire beside me all this time. I—I had no idea!"

"Oh, bunkalorum! Dad's pretty well fixed, I guess, but you needn't tell anybody about it."

Frembach moistened his dry lips. "You don't know what this means to me; you can't possibly." A strange, new fire burned in the dull eyes. The listlessness had vanished. He even broke into a tuneless whistle. "It—it's a *miracle!*"

That afternoon Tommy was told that Mr. Burroughs desired to see him. He went downstairs rather reluctantly, fearful that what he had done had been discovered.

Apparently, however, Mr. Burroughs had no inkling of the truth. He merely said: "Frembach's leaving us." His cold gray eyes roved searchingly over Tommy's features.

Tommy's disarming candor saved him: "Yes. He told me."

"Know why?" The question came abruptly.

"Why—no, sir." It was hard to lie. But one learned many things in business.

"Any idea?"

"I—I think he's going to take a rest."

"He didn't seem very tired last time I saw him." The words were put as a statement, but the interrogation in them was plain.

Tommy merely shrugged his shoulders, and remained silent. He was wise enough to guess that if he allowed himself to be drawn into discussion he was lost.

"Hum! Learned much chemistry?"

"Some."

"That's all I expected. Well, this'll be a good time to change." He was silent for a moment, his fingers tapping rhythmically on the desk. "Report Monday to Mr. Kloepke in the shop."

"Yes, sir." Tommy took it that the interview was ended, and rose. He was thankful that his secret remained undisclosed.

He was almost to the door when Mr. Burroughs' cool voice halted him: "Just a moment, Cass. You have no objection to hard work, I hope—*dirty* work?"

"Why, no, sir—none at all."

"That's good. You'll get a lot of it."

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE MACHINE FARMER

TO replace horses taken from the farms for war purposes, the food administration points out, as many as one hundred and forty thousand new tractors, averaging ten horse power each, will be required to produce big crops this season.

A real production problem is thus presented, for the normal tractor output of the whole country is only about eighty thousand machines a year, and the increased demand comes at a time of labor shortage and clogged-up steel mills and railroads.

It brings home forcibly that the problem of getting into the war is followed by the problem of replacing what is sent—whether it be horses, equipment, laborers, or soldiers.

Food has become the world's greatest problem; it has always held this position, but now it throws the shadow of an eclipse even over strategic military campaigns that are determining the future of the world for hundreds of years to come.

Under the conscription law of Canada, men of ability are being combed in—even college professors and presidents of great industries—but the Canadian farmer is totally exempt. Beyond our northern border the farmer is recognized as carrying the world on his shoulders more than ever before.

The farmer is called on to plant more acres and to intensify the cultivation of old acres. The city man is summoned to help by observing wheatless days, meatless days.

Agriculture enters on a new era. Symbolic of the change is the American farm tractor.

With the coming of the tractor, hauling as many as five plows and turning up the soil in a series of furrows the width of a road, farming in its evolution passes into the beginning of the final stage of industrial development—the automatic-machine period.

THE SHIP AND HER FREIGHT

IN our brave, big plans for shipping, the Allies hope we shall remember that use of ships is as important as numbers of ships. If agricultural machinery can be shipped to France, then the peasant women and the elderly men will raise food supplies. Every ton of machinery shipped will save us from shipping ten tons of food.

Some of the vegetables and fruits of France rotted on the ground last year because there were not enough cans in which to conserve them for the winter shortage. So if we ship tin and the like products, we shall free ourselves from the need of shipping a larger tonnage of food.

The haul for coal from England to France requires a few days. The trip from America to France is a few weeks. So every ship we lend to the Allies for the short haul will be six or seven times as efficient as if we used it ourselves for the three-thousand-mile freightage.

These are three devices by which we can shorten the war. To carry them out means unity of policy for the United States, France, and England, and means using our brains before acting. A man who is quick on the trigger is a nuisance unless he aims straight. Let us be both prompt and wise. We need more ships, and the most efficient use of each ship.

ORGANIZATION

EFFICIENCY experts have long contended that there are only three real organizations in the world—the Standard Oil Company, the Roman Catholic Church, and the imperial German government. They bear absolutely no relation to each other, either actually or by comparison, but for genius in the field of organization they stand alone.

When the writer of this editorial used to "buck tongs" for the Buckeye Pipe Line Company—the Standard's Ohio branch—there was a legend among the men that when Rockefeller, Henry Flagler, Dan O'Day, and the rest of the initial oil monopoly crowd got together, word went forth to model the Standard Oil Company's policy toward its men after the Church.

It has always been a Church rule to extend charity and paternalistic help

to all comers, though they be without the pale of religion. This tendency was operative when lost mountain travelers knocked at monastery doors, and continues unbrokenly to the present time, when the parish priest opens the door of hospitality without inquiry as to your sect or denomination.

Most of the early Standard Oil men were Irish Catholics, and they were swift to see that a policy that helped a religion would help a business.

The South Penn Oil Company—Standard branch in Pennsylvania—in 1902 employed a telegraph operator at eighty dollars a month. Three weeks later the young man developed a malignant tumor on the left hip and died. For six years his mother received his full pay check; then it was cut in half, which she will find regularly in her mail as long as she lives.

The Standard Oil Company was probably aware that word of this would go forth among other employees and pay interest manifold in loyalty by the simple logic: "These are good people to work for. They'd do that for me, too."

That is why it is best to wear boiler plate when you abuse the Standard before one of its men. That is why the Standard Oil Company has never had a strike, with the single exception of dock hands loading its tankers at Bayonne, since the war began.

You will find this same paternalistic spirit or family clannishness—whichever you please to call it—in the imperial German government. Despite its morality toward outsiders, Germany has looked after her people, and the people know it. That is why the German soldiers went into their first battle singing; why they still stick to the ship after many weary months.

All business men know the value of good will of customers and are eager to spend money to acquire it.

They have been backward in realizing that the good will of their employees is even more valuable. Fortunately they are awakening. Diplomacy and common sense are taking the place of shrewdness and cunning in the business world.

WOMEN IN BUSINESS

THE entry of women into business on an aggressive scale is developing as the most revolutionary force in world industry since the invention and installation of machinery forced a hue and cry from skilled hand labor. But the introduction of machines did not throw hand laborers out of work; instead, it enabled the production of more goods, the individual's purchasing power grew greater by embracing more articles, all of which ended in creating more jobs to be filled.

The absorption of women by the business machine started with stores and offices. Long before factories began to bid for their services on any large scale, economists—usually just a highbrow name for bread-and-butter pessimists—raised shaking fingers and warned us solemnly that the women would throw thousands of men out of work.

It hasn't turned out that way at all, has it? Quite the reverse: there is a world shortage of labor.

As our civilization advances, it becomes more complicated, more intricate; there is forever more and more work to be done.

Every magazine we pick up, every Sunday newspaper, shows pictures of

women operating men's jobs in war time—street-car conductors, screw-machine and lathe operators, machine-shop assemblers, and on into a lengthy list.

The National League of Women's Service, in its latest report, boasts 1,200,000 American women officially registered as engaged in essential war industrial work. A neat hundred thousand ring up the time clock in munitions plants. This huge figure is for war work alone, and does not include more millions employed in offices, shops, factories.

What will all this lead to?

British women have been given the vote; British statesmen make no bones about admitting that the ballot is largely a reward for woman's proving her worth during the war.

Even German women in war work have a huge organization and are similarly demanding equal voting power with men.

And in America, the same argument is developing as woman's trump card in the campaign for equal franchise.

The end of the war is not apt to see returned soldiers shove women out of their jobs; female labor is cheaper labor; the soldiers will seek other fields.

A good many books could be written—have been—about the effect woman's entry into business has had on morals, marriage, and home life. Surely it has led to better mutual understanding, comradeship, and sympathy of the sexes.

The business woman stars mostly by her instinct for system, order, neatness. Business is not her natural field—usually she drifts into home life—and that is probably why there are so few nationally known business women; they don't keep at it long enough. Hetty Green was an exception; so was Cora Dow, who built up one of the first great systems of chain drug stores entirely on her own initiative.

TORPEDOED

NOT long ago the writer of this was torpedoed as he was crossing the Atlantic on a liner. In company with many others, he was thrown out in a lifeboat into a rolling sea. The lifeboat sank at the end of the first hour, and the wet, worried passengers received a neat, clean-cut, punctual rescue just as the seas washed over the derelict.

When he came to write the experience, he found that all he could tell was a simple story of fact, with no high lights, no thrills. He would have liked to write a record of man's heroism; but the truth is that there were no heroes and no cowards. There was no astonishing leadership in crisis. The whole thing was a rather dreary business in a chilly, gray sea, where average men muddled along and showed the same traits as in a city street.

The hero drama is disappearing. The world is learning the untruth of the old convention that neglected average humanity by creating unduly heavy villains and dazzlingly daring heroes. A war is conducted not by a radiant Achilles, but by multitudes of common men who grumble and carry on. A great commercial business is not the product of a single superman's mind, but the patient fitting together of the work of ten thousand obscure plodders, earning the daily wage. A sudden sea accident does not reveal a starry leader among a boatload of cowards. It reveals a hundred ordinary human beings who make mistakes and practice patience and mix the instinct of self-preservation with a measure of unselfishness.

INTERNATIONAL BIMETALLISM?

SENATOR JOHN F. SHAFROTH, of Colorado, has introduced a resolution in the Senate as follows:

To provide for a commission to negotiate an international agreement as to the coinage of silver.

Whereas, The settlement of balances of trade with silver-using countries threatens the depletion of our stock of gold, although such countries prefer that such balances should be paid in silver; and

Whereas, To relieve such condition it is necessary that the production of silver be increased; and

Whereas, The enormous expansion in world credits during the past three years necessitates the enlargement of the base upon which such credits are founded, therefore be it

Resolved, by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the president be authorized to appoint a commission of three members to visit our allied and the neutral nations of the world with a view of making an international agreement as to the coinage of silver, subject to approval by Congress.

Sec. 2. That the sum of one hundred thousand dollars, or so much thereof as may be necessary, be, and the same is hereby, appropriated, out of any money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated, to pay the expenses and compensation of such commission.

In supporting this proposed measure, it is pointed out that to give stability to its commercial and financial operations, the world must return to a specie basis; that the present gold base is too small to sustain the stupendous credits and accumulation of uncovered paper money now existing. The uncovered circulation of five of the principal countries at war in July, 1914, and in December, 1917, was as follows:

	1914.	1917.
France	$372,500,000	$3,140,000,000
Germany	74,200,000	2,160,000,000
Great Britain	8,000,000	637,000,000
Italy	101,000,000	726,000,000
Russia	16,000,000	8,070,000,000
Total	$571,700,000	$14,733,000,000

To show how money and credit has been consumed by the frightful monster of war now ravaging the earth, we append its estimated cost up to March, 1918, as calculated by F. W. Hirst, former editor of *The London Economist:*

Great Britain and Colonies	$30,000,000,000
Germany	30,000,000,000
Russia	27,500,000,000
France	25,000,000,000
Austria-Hungary	12,500,000,000
United States	12,500,000,000
Italy	7,500,000,000
Total	$145,000,000,000

As the total national debt of these countries before the outbreak of war was only $30,950,450,000, it may be realized what the expansion of credits has been since that time. If in ante-bellum days there was no more gold than necessary to sustain the currencies and credits of the world, imagine the inadequacy now.

Bimetallism, much as the white race dislikes it, may prove the solution of the financial and trade impasse.

"Neckless Chicken"

By William H. Hamby

Author of "Señoritas and Swamps," "Room at the Bottom," Etc.

One novel way of Hooverizing would be to invent a chicken without a neck, for that part of the bird is generally passed up. Mr. Hamby reveals to us an animal that makes a "chicken" salad without the bony-neck drawback of the barnyard fowl. Marketing the creature makes the story

IT was raining. And when it rains in San Diego all Californians look guilty; they feel they are responsible to the tourists who belligerently declare: "This is just as bad as it is back home."

Usually it is not, but even if it were it is scarcely justification for being homesick. Yet Rand Clayton, as he turned from the drizzly dusk into the Lanier Cafeteria, was homesick—homesick for something he had never had. The place was crowded this evening, and a line of tray seekers a hundred feet long stretched from the door along the north wall to the food counter.

There was a young woman already at the small table on which Clayton unloaded his tray; there was some one at every table. Perhaps that is one of the attractions of a cafeteria—one seldom dines alone, and his involuntary dinner guest may have come from India with an old religion, or from San Francisco with a new labor union, be a furniture salesman from Michigan, a lodge organizer from Colorado, or merely a tourist with the rheumatism.

As Clayton opened the sealed package of crackers that went with his soup, he glanced around the room, then his eyes lingered an instant on the young woman across the table. She had finely marked eyebrows that gave a look of reserve to brown eyes that were humanly responsive.

"This seems to be a popular place to eat," he remarked.

"I like it because there are no waiters." Already she had taken stock of him, and saw that he was decidedly lonesome and not at all impertinent. "Once I went to one of these 'Over Beyond' spirit meetings," she continued with a humorous smile, "and one of the speakers declared that he could see beings in the air nobody else could. One of them, he said, looked like a red pig with a wide snout, and it was its job to suck up waste magnetism. A waiter hovering around my elbow always makes me think uneasily of that red pig."

Clayton laughed, and looked at her with a more definite interest. There was no aggressiveness about her, but a resolute mouth gave an impression of strength and persistency.

"I've thought of a new advertisement for a cafeteria," he remarked, "one of those impertinent, interrogative advertisements that stare you out of countenance in the street car.

" 'Why not tip less and eat more?' "

"Yes," she amended, "or 'Eat on the tip and save the price of dinner.' "

It was then he noticed, stacked on her check, a dime and four pennies—the price of a bowl of soup, bread and butter, and a cup of tea.

"You are broke," he said.

"Yes." There was no humor in her face now, but a whiteness showed at the corners of her mouth. "And you are going to be."

Clayton felt himself sink into the chair as though every muscle had suddenly gone flabby. He wondered why

she thought so. He was fairly well dressed and well groomed. Was failure written on him so plainly that even a stranger could see it?

"What makes you think so?" He forced a smile. "Are you a fortune teller?"

"No." She looked observingly into his tired blue eyes. "But I can always tell when one is letting go of a limb to climb down the tree."

"Maybe I'm letting go to climb up," he suggested, but the chill of doubt was in his tone.

"I hope so," she replied with real sympathy. "But be careful; plum trees in this country have thorns on them."

"Anyway," he urged, "let me lend you a dollar; the West is a bad place to be broke in."

"No." She shook her head positively. "I am going to work to-morrow." Her resolute mouth shut close; there was no droop at the corners. And he knew the job was not one of choice.

But he slipped the dollar across the table and arose.

"If I'm to be broke, it doesn't matter when. So take it. Good-by!"

He did not look back, but she followed close in the line until after he had passed the cashier.

Once out in the rain again, he put his hands in his coat pockets, and found the dollar!

The rain came down in a steady drizzle-drazzle; the sidewalks and crossings reflected the street lights; the fog was low, hiding the tops of the tall buildings.

Clayton walked a dozen blocks, and then kept going and going. He was physically tired, and his clothes were damp, but he did not care. He was in a state of mental rawness and inflammation that made him want to hurt something, and he did not mind if it was himself. It was rather a relief to have something definite to be angry at —something positive to kick against. His soreness and wet clothes, the slippery, sloppy night—the dark fog—the bedraggled street which he now followed, all gave him some object against which to rail.

He was at the end of the pier. Back there were stacks and stacks of lumber. In the water below him logs from the North, recently released from a great raft, wallowed in the bay.

Out yonder a light flickered in the fog, a moving light—and then another and another—fishing boats coming in from Mexican waters.

Rand's discontent, his anger, his bitterness dwindled out in this weird isolation of fog, the low lapping *wosh-wosh* of the water, and the little, dim fishing boats gliding in through the bay one at a time. And it left him a feeling of detachment—a cold sense of aloofness, of utter failure.

"I can't even stay mad," he said contemptuously. "Things just dwindle out with me."

He shrugged his shoulders, chilled and wet, and turned back uptown to his fifty-cent room, for he was much nearer broke than even the girl had guessed.

II.

T. Edgerton Townsend, attorney at law, stood at the window of his office on the seventh floor of the Central Insurance Building, and looked down on the city with the supercilious smile of a person who hypocritically strokes a purring cat.

The town, to his way of thinking, lacked a great many things—sophistication, social exclusiveness, the stability of old families—but it had one redeeming quality—it appreciated his legal ability most profitably.

The telephone rang.

T. Edgerton moved with the precise deliberation of a man slightly undersized and therefore determined to show force by restraint. He always opened a telephone conversation with a well-modulated, but chilly and incisive "Yes?"

"Rand Clayton? Is that so? How do you do, Rand? I had no idea you were in this part of the world. Haven't heard of you since we left the university. To be sure, come up and see me. Just a minute until I consult my mem-

orandum. Come in at ten-thirty and I shall be pleased to see you. Good-by!"

As Clayton entered the outer office a squat, dark, heavy-headed Mexican was leaving, and turned in the hall to look at him suspiciously.

Rand Clayton had never dreaded anything so much as the call on T. Edgerton Townsend. If the girl in the cafeteria, a perfect stranger, could see he had been slipping down from one precarious level to another, how readily would Townsend, who had last seen him as the brilliant class orator at the university commencement, notice the change. Townsend was backed by the same family traditions as Clayton—traditions which implied that anything but intellectual pursuits was ignoble, yet T. Edgerton, even in college, had worshipped the golden-calf brand of success. And while he was overfastidious and supercritical, his scholarly pursuit had fangs to it which held on to the financial meat of his profession. But Rand had not proved a success in the law; at least not a financial success.

After the first sharp survey of his former schoolmate, it required a conscious effort for T. Edgerton to appear interested in what Rand said. One of the tragedies of failure is it makes one's words futile. The only real interest in the visit for Townsend was when he leaned back carelessly in his chair and told with the braggadocio of depreciation of his own "small success," which he implied netted him about fifteen thousand a year—and promised to double itself shortly.

Then he let his eyes stray frequently to some legal papers on his desk, and finally asked if Rand would not come back in an hour and go with him to lunch at the University Club.

Clayton accepted without any anticipation of jovialty. Altogether, T. Edgerton's cordiality had had about the same effect as a northeast wind smiling on neuralgia.

"By the way," Clayton's fingers shook noticeably as he reached into his pocket, "I have a letter for you."

He tried to appear unconcerned while his old schoolmate read it, but there were wrinkles of anxiety at the corners of his eyes as he looked out of the window, waiting a decision. If he did not get this job as insurance adjuster, what would he do?

"Too bad," said T. Edgerton, laying the letter regretfully on his desk, "that you did not come earlier. I gave this job to another man day before yesterday."

And Clayton knew he lied.

III.

At last it had come—the time that Rand had foreseen creeping upon him for three years and dreaded like the approach of a deadly disease. He was face to face with the crude, elemental wants of life—food and a place to sleep.

As Rand entered the cafeteria, with his last forty cents in his pocket, he remembered the prophecy of the girl he had met there two weeks before.

He saw her over in one corner, eating alone, and went to her table. He did not think of it, but there was, perhaps, no one else in the world he would have voluntarily dined with on this night of his most abysmal blues.

She smiled as she moved her coffeepot and lettuce salad to one side to make room for the things from his tray.

"You still eat."

"This once," he replied dismally. "You were a good prophet."

"Really broke?" In her brown eyes sympathetic fellowship.

"To the very jumping-off place," he replied, unwrapping his napkin.

"I used to be scared almost into hysterics," she remarked, "when I was to be broke to-morrow. But now I don't much mind."

"Got used to it?" Even through his own misery he saw she was a little paler and the lines about her mouth tenser than before.

"Not exactly used to it," she answered, "but I've discovered it doesn't kill. I never starve; one can always get work enough in a restaurant or kitchen somewhere to pay for a meal."

He looked at her wonderingly. What

sort of courage was this which could face being broke and down and out with equanimity? And she was only a woman, and not particularly strong at that.

"Would you work in a kitchen if you were broke?" He had always thought of kitchen help as stout and blowsy. Her face was fine and intelligent, but of the democratic sort. When it relaxed and smiled it was almost beautiful.

"I should say so," she laughed. "I have more than once. The other evening, when I met you, an employment agency had just promised me a job as a domestic on a ranch thirty miles out in the country.

"Well, I went the next morning, paid the stage driver a dollar—my last cent—and walked two miles from the stage line into the country to the ranch house.

"It was a two-story, unpainted frame thing, with a dirt yard—— Just the look of it made you wonder what is the use of living. It was worse inside. Everything was at sixes and sevens—dirty; I never saw a dirtier place! The woman was one of those faultfinding, flabby sort that saves up her strength to use on her tongue muscle. The first thing she asked me was: 'Where is your bedding?' She asked it in such an insulting tone that I told her I did not usually carry it around with me.

"'Well, I want you to know,' she said, 'that no hired girl can sleep in my beds.' 'All right,' I replied, 'you can pay my stage fare back to San Diego. I certainly can't sit up.'

"But finally she fitted up an old cot with dirty quilts and a shuck pillow in a north room that had one small window. There was no bathroom in the house.

"Then she put me to work. She began every remark with: 'Now I want you to know.' The first, after the bed was settled, was: 'And now I want you to know I'm boss here—and I don't take no sass from no hired girl. Now I want you to know that when the children ask for anything, you are to get it for them—and I don't want no jawing about it, either.'"

Clayton had forgotten all about himself as he listened to this bit of real life.

"How long did you stay?"

"A week." Her face looked tired, and her eyes smoldered a moment. "It was horrible—but I had to stay a week, for I hadn't a cent and no way to get back to town.

"Now," she smiled with a distinct effort, "I have a job to-morrow in town—working for a young couple that dress up to eat in a cold dining room and talk college Greek to each other. I'm a very successful saleswoman, but had a run of hard times, and must get a new line and have at least two weeks' living expenses ahead before I start again.

"If I were only educated like you!" She looked at him with wistful admiration.

"Aren't you? You use good language."

"No—I am not educated at all. What I know I learned by myself. My people were ignorant, and not very careful in their way of living. Mother married again when I was eight years old. She used to neglect me, and my stepfather beat me. My clothes were not clean, and my hair not cared for, and the other children at school made fun of me so I couldn't stand it. I ran away at fourteen," she continued in a matter-of-fact way, "and asked the judge to send me to the girls' reform school so I could escape the beatings. He did, and at eighteen I was paroled out to work for a farmer and his wife in Wisconsin. They treated me very well, and I was getting along fine until I slapped a Swede farm hand for insulting me. He went to the farmer's wife and lied to her. She believed him, and ordered me to leave."

Her brown eyes grew darker, and she knotted the napkin in her hands.

"What happened then?" He had forgotten to eat the liver and bacon on his plate.

"Oh, I had more or less hard times, but managed some way. I'll tell you how I got a start some time."

"And you still like to live?" The

question came from the drab corner in his own mind.

"Sure," she replied warmly. "Living is lots of fun. Next time we meet I'll tell you what these people say to each other as they eat their soup in state and shiver in a cold dining room.

"Good-by." She arose, smiled, and went toward the cashier with her check and two dimes and three pennies.

As Clayton left the cafeteria he felt a grin on his face—the first in a long time. He was thinking of the picture the girl had given him of the people for whom she was going to work. He could not only see that young man and his wife putting on evening clothes every night to sit alone in a cold dining room, saying polite, scholarly things to each other; but could see how amusing it would look from the kitchen door. No doubt a lot of things one did to keep up form and tradition looked ridiculous to people just outside the little ring-around-rosy circle.

It was a novel experience, this looking at life through the eyes of one who thought from her work up; instead, as he always had, from his books down. He was so interested in it he forgot for the time being that he was broke, and got to sleep without dreading tomorrow as much as he had feared.

The next day, T. Edgerton Townsend hunted Rand up by telephone, and invited him to dinner that evening. There was no prospect of dinner anywhere else, so he accepted the invitation.

Townsend and Clayton were in the living room, smoking. Mrs. Townsend had not yet appeared.

Rand heard a voice in the kitchen—a sharply cultivated, but cutting, voice—and knew she was giving the cook a genteel New England dressing down. Perhaps the potatoes were scorched or the butter at the wrong angle on the plates.

At last Mrs. Townsend entered, with a frosty, supercilious smile, and greeted the guest. She was a precise, tall person with thin lips and chilly blue eyes, as devoid of humor as a clothesline.

"This is a dreadful place, Mr. Clayton, to get good domestic help," she began. "I am having great difficulties in keeping the home up even to tolerable standards."

As the three sat at the table the maid, who was also cook, started to place Rand's soup. Mrs. Townsend frowned and said sharply:

"Not on that side, Evelyn."

Clayton looked up. It was the girl of the cafeteria—and she blushed.

He nodded and smiled cordially.

"Why, how do you do, Miss Holland?"

Mrs. Townsend turned white, and bit her thin lips hard, making the same effort to overlook the guest's breach of propriety as she would to have ignored an obscenity. T. Edgerton, only a little less shocked, also made an effort to appear unconscious.

The dinner progressed most stiffly. Just before the dessert, during a pause in the forced conversation, a suppressed laugh escaped from the kitchen—a sort of choking laugh, as though the girl was stuffing a towel in her mouth to keep it back.

Mrs. Townsend arose frigidly, and went out, and Rand heard those measured tones of virtuous indignation:

"That will do. You may go tonight. I do not care to have your type of person in my house."

Back in his three-dollar-a-week room, Clayton turned out the rusty gas jet, and sat a long time in the dark, looking out on the city that winked softly in the fog.

He had utterly failed to lead the intellectual life. He had been failing from the start. He was drifting into intellectual dry rot.

When one succeeds in mental pursuits, it is the best life there is, perhaps. But when one fails it is an appalling, wasting, heartbreaking failure. He had failed; just why he had not quite figured out. He had brains and the training for a successful lawyer, but he had not succeeded. He had tried a number of intellectual, gentlemanly positions, each of declining importance

and increasing financial uncertainty. In all of them he had failed.

He lighted the jet, took the dress suit, which he had removed on his return from dinner, rolled it up, and flung it out of the window.

"Damn it!" he said. "I am no longer a scholar and a gentleman—nor a snob. To-morrow I'll get a job."

IV.

It is quite a mental feat for a man to live by his brain, and a legal one for him to live by his wits. Intellectual pursuits are by no means so easy as they appear to a bystander; nor physical ones so hard. But the transition at first is difficult. The repugnance to dirt and blisters and bosses, ingrained for a dozen generations, disappears slowly and leaves a sort of dead-sea-fruit ash deposited in the soul.

It was a June evening, and Clayton sat on the pier of the Silver Brand Canning Company, watching the fishing boats prepare to go out. In garb and in attitude, Rand looked the part of an ordinary day laborer. But overalls and calloused hands did not take from his eyes and face an expression of more than ordinary fineness and intelligence.

Since December he had worked at a half dozen jobs—all of them hard. A carpenter's assistant, a freight hustler, a member of a telephone-wire gang; he had even for a week carried brick on a building being erected on Townsend's wharf property.

During this time he had worked and eaten and slept, thinking little and forgetting all of his past life that he could. He had tried to make himself merely a day laborer, with only a laborer's wants and ambitions.

But this evening, at the end of one job, and ready to begin something else, his mind began to stir, to choose, to plan to help his newly built muscle to bring in more returns.

A short, amiable Jap came down the pier and began to load a net into his boat.

Rand got up on an impulse and walked down the pier.

"I'd like to go this trip with you," he said to the Jap.

"All light," assented the little brown man. "I need man."

And that was the way Clayton became a fisherman.

There is as much difference between being a fisherman for pay and a fisherman for sport as there is between digging up the soil with a hoe and with a golf club.

It was hard work, and dirty work. The boat went out about dark, cast anchor in the bay. Two fishermen slept on the deck, and two in the tiny cabin until two o'clock. Then they put out to sea, keeping a sharp watch for the phosphorescent streak in the water that told of a school of sardines.

After they had netted enough of these little fish for the day's bait, they headed south toward the Mexican coast, where the yellowtails most frequently ran.

When they found a run of fish, they stopped the boat and threw out a few buckets of sardines. The yellowtails gathered, fighting ravenously for the bait. Then the fisherman got busy. He tied one end of a short stout line around his arm; on the large, barbless hook at the other end he attached a live sardine. Almost the instant it struck the water it was snapped up, and, hand over hand, the fisherman lifted the fish overboard, flung it on deck, and rebaited the hook. The fish average about twenty pounds each, and at favorable times one fisherman caught a ton within an hour.

While the biting is good the fish are left to flounder at will over the deck, but after the run is over the fishermen proceed to clean the catch. It is oily, smelly work, and at first Rand found it exceedingly repugnant. But at most there were only six or seven hours of actual labor in a day's fishing, and that left many hours of both night and day in which to watch the sea—to listen to it and to think.

The owner of the boat first paid the expenses of the trip out of the receipts. Then counting the boat for one share, the fishermen shared alike in the catch.

Yellowtail were selling at the cannery for forty dollars a ton, and a good trip brought in four or five tons, often more.

This was by far the best money Clayton had made for a long time. At the end of the month he went to the Sheldon Boat Building Company.

"How much money have you?" asked the manager when Clayton proposed to buy a boat.

"Three hundred dollars," said Rand.

The manager looked at him estimatingly for a moment. This fellow did not seem like a fisherman, but still all sorts of men get the sea fever, and the company needed more markets for boats.

"I have a secondhand boat—a small one, only thirty feet, but it is in fair condition; I can sell it to you, equipped, for twenty-four hundred dollars. Will take your three hundred down, and you turn in half your catch on it each trip."

"All right," Clayton agreed. "Let's go down and look at it."

That night Rand went out in his own boat.

Elated more than he ever had been over winning a lawsuit, he headed proudly back to the bay the next afternoon with over two tons of fish. "A hundred dollars on my first trip!"

But his elation was as short-lived as a toy balloon. Helms, the manager of the canning company, laughed at Rand's ignorance.

"Don't you know any more about fish than that? Those are albacores—finned tuna—absolutely worthless."

"They look good," insisted Rand.

"Yes, but they are not."

It was awful to waste two tons of fish. If nobody would buy them, he would give them away; yet few even of the wharf loafers would take one.

"Hanged if I don't try it myself!" he said doggedly. He picked out one of the smaller ones and dumped the rest.

On the way uptown he overtook the cafeteria girl, whom he had not seen for a long time.

"How do you do, Miss Holland?"

The girl turned quickly, surprised. But she offered her hand in glad recognition.

"Up from the sea instead of the dead," she smiled. "I've wondered what had become of you."

"I've been working." He said it with pride. Some way he felt that this girl of all the world would be proud of what he had done. And, after all, a man's hope of success is to prove himself a man in somebody's eyes.

"Behold!" he said, with sudden mock levity, holding the fish toward her. "A Greek bearing a gift. Allow me to present you."

"Really?" She opened her eyes questioningly. "Thanks; that is fine! Madge and I were wondering what we would have for supper; we have a small flat together." She had been studying him from the corner of her eyes. He had changed. There was still something lonesome and appealing about him, but he had gained force. "Come share the fish with us, won't you, or have you a dinner engagement?"

"I certainly will go. I've never had a dinner engagement since that night you lost your job at Townsend's."

They laughed, but her eyes looked tired and troubled.

After supper, Rand said lightly to Madge:

"You go to a picture show, and I'll help wash the dishes."

"You couldn't any more wash dishes than a bear could play a harp," Madge bantered.

"I never have," confessed Rand. "But I have done a lot of things the last year I never had done before. This is one more to learn. Give me a chance."

"All right," said Madge; "go to it. But hold on to the dishes instead of Ida's hands; they are more breakable."

Ida Holland blushed, but laughingly pushed her toward the door.

"You promised to tell me how you got a start," prompted Rand as they began carrying the dishes to the sink in the small kitchen. "Getting a start is a very interesting subject to me just now."

"Well, when the farmer's wife sent

me away"—the girl tested the water in the dishpan with the tips of her fingers to see if it was too hot—"I was eighteen, and had no friends and nowhere to go. I hadn't been very strong, and was sick the day I left. I had a dollar and seventy-five cents, which they had given me for canning fruit while they attended the county fair.

"I went to a town twenty-four miles down the railroad and hunted work. It was dull times then, and I could give no references.

"The next afternoon I was sitting in the little park, sick and so blue the tears just wouldn't stay back. A man was sitting on the other end of the bench, eating pears. He was a very good-looking man, with kind eyes. Directly he slipped along the bench and held out the bag to me. 'Have a pair of pears,' he laughed in a friendly way.

"I took the pear, and directly we were talking. I told him that I had been hunting work. He was the general agent for a floor mop, and offered me a dollar a day and expenses to be one of his agents.

"It seemed a Providence direct from heaven. But," she shook her head and smiled with pitying memory, "I could not sell the mop. I worked all next morning, and did not sell one, and went back to the hotel knowing I was a failure. The sales manager saw my eyes were red, and knew I had been crying. 'I think you are sick,' he said. 'Rest this afternoon and try it again to-morrow.'

"But I knew I could not sell any mops. I tried next day, with the same result.

"'I can't do it; I'll have to give it up,' I told him that evening. 'If you lend me three dollars, I'll go to Chicago and try to get work.'

"He shook his head. 'I can't spare three dollars now. I know you can sell mops. You can do anything. You have success written all over your face. It takes a little time; you are scared and nervous. You go right on trying from day to day, and I will pay your wages whether you sell any or not.'"

Rand saw the resolute lines draw taut in her face, and her eyes light with the eager memory of that battle.

"I did. The third day I sold one, the fourth three, and at the end of the week I beat even the manager himself!

"After that I became a very successful saleswoman. I could get the best lines, and often made thirty or forty dollars a day. But it cost a great deal on the road; of course I wore good clothes and stopped at the best hotels. Still, I saved some. In four years I had seven thousand dollars, and I decided I was so successful a business woman I could get rich.

"I came here just as the boom was starting, and bought a piece of land over on the bay front for four thousand; paid two thousand down and gave a mortgage for the other two.

"With the rest I set up a furnishing shop. But the boom did not come fast enough—not for me. I lost all I had on the shop, closed it out, and went back on the road as a saleswoman.

"The West was hard hit in a business way during that year, and my line was a sort of luxury. I was scarcely making expenses.

"Then I got sick, and came back here to try to get something out of my lot, but I could not sell it. The boom had not gone that way. Finally the mortgage came due and was closed. I lost that.

"At last I got down to where I had a dime and four pennies." She smiled as she saw he remembered.

"I make about a dollar and a half a day in the box factory," she continued. "And Madge and I have combined on this flat, so we are saving money. I think in two months maybe I'll be ready to start again."

"Do you know," said Rand, touched, "I think you are the pluckiest person I ever knew."

Her face grew warm and almost beautiful under the compliment.

"Thank you—but I'm not. I'm an awful coward, and sometimes when I think I might be caught in the grind of things and never get out——"

"You always would," he said reassuringly. "I knew that the first eve-

ning I saw you. There is something in you that can't be crushed."

They talked a little while longer, Rand for the first time telling something of his own downhill struggles.

"Oh, by the way," he asked, "when was that mortgage foreclosed on your lots?"

"Ten months ago."

When he arose to go, he inquired:

"Did you notice anything wrong with that fish?"

"Why, no; I thought it was the best I have had since I have been here. Why, was it spoiled?" She smiled.

"No. It was a fish that is supposed not to be fit to eat. They won't buy it. I was a greenhorn and got a whole boatload before I knew any better. It tasted good to me; I don't see why it has such a bad reputation."

"Maybe," she suggested, "a fish's reputation, like a woman's, may be spoiled by hearsay."

"Well," said Rand, "I don't take hearsay about a woman's reputation, and I'm going to give that fish a hearing."

V.

There is a good deal of bogus consolation in the shape of free air and scenery and sunshine poked out to failures. But it takes a successful man to enjoy even what is free. That is, he must be successful in some one way that gives him a feeling of power and self-respect.

Contrary to all the carefree, joyous wayside literature, a tramp does not enjoy the scenery. A man broke does not thrill with ecstasy at the river as he walks the bridge. A battered derelict on the park bench is not enjoying the flowers one-tenth as much as the man beside him who has just had a raise in salary.

The sea had never looked so good to Rand Clayton as it did that afternoon in August when he headed in for the bay with a six-ton catch of fish that was to finish paying for his boat.

He had cleared, above his living, twenty-six hundred dollars in eleven weeks. Two American fishermen and a half dozen Japs had done even better, but Rand was satisfied; more, he was happy. Sitting on the deck of the little boat—*his* boat—he watched the long trail of sunlight across the sea, saw the gulls perched on the bell buoy, and looked up to where the old Spanish lighthouse on top of Point Loma stood outlined against the sky, and said fervently:

"Thank God I quit trying to be a lawyer!"

Hurrying along Crosby Street from the pier, he met T. Edgerton Townsend face to face. Townsend had passed him a number of times the last six months without recognizing him. Tonight he stopped, as though for the first time aware that he was in town.

"Why, hello, Rand! Where have you been keeping yourself? How goes the world?"

T. Edgerton was just returning from the Sheldon Boat Building Company, which had started an addition to their shop on the vacant land east of them. The lawyer had heard there of Clayton's successful venture with the boat.

"Oh, I've been fishing," replied Clayton, taking the offered hand indifferently. "Got an engagement, so must hurry along." He was to celebrate the last payment on his boat by taking Ida Holland to dinner and to a show.

Townsend smiled his patronizing, supercilious, half-indecent smile.

"Are you still rushing the hired girl? That sure gave the missus a shock. She was raised in an atmosphere where one is not supposed to know such affairs exist."

"Townsend"—Clayton felt the muscle in his right arm, muscle that had pulled in nearly a hundred tons of fish the last few months, swelling dangerously—"Townsend," he repeated, "if I did not know your nasty thoughts are the fungus from musty snobbery and intellectual dry rot, I would change that sneer on your face to a bruise.

"I've learned a lot of things in six months. I will tell you one of them, and if you ever forget it turn your face the other way when we meet.

"That young woman who was in your

kitchen is twenty-seven times pluckier than you or I, and has more strength of character. She is as good as your wife and has a darned sight more sense and heart."

The little lawyer's lips grew livid, but he kept up the sneering smile as he went on down the street.

Tuesday afternoon, Rand and his fishermen found a run of yellowtail just off the Mexican shore near Ensenada. They had dumped the call bait, and the fish were gathering so thick they flopped out of the water in their scramble for the sardines.

"I wonder what the dickens——" Rand saw the little Mexican gunboat headed for them.

A few minutes later it came up and ordered them out.

Rand parleyed; the rest were fishing. The Mexican commander explained they had concessions; he must get a license.

"From whom?"

"Señor Vegonia, at San Diego."

Puzzled, angry, but helpless, Clayton regretfully left the run of yellowtail and turned back north.

When he landed he went immediately to Señor Vegonia.

"What does license cost to fish in Mexican water?"

The Mexican had an uncertain eye. He shrugged and waved his hands.

"Oh—perhaps—four hundred dollars a week."

"Four hundred dollars! Impossible!"

"Not feesh, then," said the Mexican.

Clayton bargained, but to his surprise discovered Señor Vegonia would not yield one dollar.

Rand went away, thinking hard. It was plain he was not to fish. Somebody had started to put him out of business.

When the boats came in the next afternoon he started an investigation, and found they all had been held up, but there was no uniformity of charge. Some had been made to pay a cent a pound on their catch; some only a half cent; others had paid a lump sum for time concessions, while two or three others refused to talk. But only of Clayton had there been demanded such an exorbitant license as four hundred dollars a week.

Rand continued his investigation. He remembered Señor Vegonia as the Mexican he had met coming out of Townsend's office. At the end of three days he became convinced that Townsend, Vegonia, and one of the Mexican officials of Lower California had formed a combination to rob the fishermen under the name of concessions.

Clayton went out on the pier, sat with his feet dangling over the water, and looked out across the bay. Some of the boats were coming in with their catch. His own boat rocked idly near by.

Whatever Townsend's plans were, whatever the graft of the fishing monopoly, it all came to the same thing—they did not intend for him to fish under any circumstances. To fight them meant money and time and a long way around.

He had no time nor money to spare; not now. Well, he did not have to fish.

Rand got up and went to Ida Holland's flat; it was after five and she would be home from the box factory.

"Come in!" It was a preoccupied tone that answered his knock.

She was packing her trunk, and Rand felt a sudden sense of utter desolation.

"Not going?" He sat down limply. He had not known how much her being here had counted.

"Yes," she replied fatalistically, "I've got to go." She sat down on the lid of the trunk, and pushed the loose hair back from the forehead with the back of her hand. There was a restless fire in her brown eyes. "I can't stand being a failure any longer," she said. "I know it is the worst time in the world to get a start, but I've got to do better than this."

He looked at her intently; saw the unquenchable fire in her face. That was what made success. Never, never anywhere, at any time, would Ida Holland endure failure as a permanent guest.

"Don't go now." The tragedy of aloneness was in his face as he got up and came toward her. "I've got to fight, and I need you."

Quickly the smoldering look in her eyes softened and tears came—the first for a long time.

"I won't go if you need me; I did not know anybody needed me."

VI.

Rand was busy next morning. Before noon he had discovered the Sheldon Boat Building Company had agreed to give Townsend twelve thousand dollars' worth of stock in the enlarged company for the land on which they were building the addition. For the runways, tideland was leased from the city. Townsend had merely given them a contract for a deed, the deed to be delivered within two weeks, but, being in a hurry because of rush orders, they had begun work on the shop.

At eleven o'clock he went to see Helms, the superintendent of the Occidental Canning Company.

"I understand the Bay Sardine Cannery will not operate this fall," suggested Rand.

"No, they are closed for good," said Helms. "In fact, the sardine canneries are done for here. The Norwegian sardines have crowded them off the market. We will can a few for the local trade, but there is nothing in it."

"Could the Bay Company's factory be turned into a cannery for other fish —like yellowtail?" questioned Clayton.

"Yes, very easily, and at no great expense. You would have to have different seaming machines and cookers. But the same buildings and sterilizing retorts and boilers could be used."

"What do you suppose the Bay Sardine Company's plant could be bought for?"

"At about any figure a man would offer. The business is dead on the whole coast, and the thing is worth little more than what it can be scrapped for. The stuff they have there cost about ten thousand. I imagine the whole plant could be bought for three or four thousand."

At noon Rand met Ida Holland at the box factory as she started to lunch.

"I've got a paper for you to sign," he told her. "Come up the street to a notary's office."

"What is it?" she asked curiously.

"Power of attorney. I want you to authorize me to manage your property."

"But I haven't any property," she exclaimed.

"Then you won't be afraid to sign; you can't lose anything. Come on!"

She went with him, and signed the paper without any further explanations.

At one-thirty, Clayton entered the outer office of T. Edgerton Townsend.

"Take this in to Mr. Townsend," he directed, giving the stenographer a card.

T. Edgerton opened the door from his private office a moment later, the card in his hand, a look of defensive curiosity on his round face.

"Come in," he nodded.

Clayton took the chair indicated. The supercilious little lawyer sat down at his desk, glanced at the card.

RAND CLAYTON,
Attorney at law.

"Beating back, are you? Going to try the law again?" he remarked patronizingly.

"Only once," answered Clayton shortly. "This is my last appearance as a lawyer."

"And—may I ask what is the occasion for this one legal pyrotechnic display?"

"I am here as the attorney for Ida Holland."

"And who may Ida Holland be?" That nasty smile was still on his face.

"Ida Holland," replied Clayton, "was the owner of a certain plot of land on the bay front—the land upon which the Sheldon Boat Building Company is starting to erect an addition. Eleven months and twenty-eight days ago you foreclosed a mortgage for two thousand dollars on that land.

"You understand, of course, the California laws. As Ida Holland's attor-

ney, I have come to make payment and redeem the land."

"What has happened?" asked Ida Holland as she admitted Rand to the small living room. "You look as though you had just been kissed by good luck."

"Better than that." Clayton's eyes lighted humorously. "I've been cursed by T. Edgerton Townsend. I had an interview with him this afternoon that was very pleasant for me; therefore, very painful for him. I had gone to him to redeem your land, and he——"

"Redeem my land!" she exclaimed. "What are you talking about?"

"There is a law in California that when one closes a mortgage on real estate the owner of the real estate or any one with an interest in it may redeem it within a year by paying off the original mortgage and one per cent interest a month.

"The year lacked two days of being up, so I bought your land back, or rather I wrenched it away from T. Edgerton with red-hot legal tongs."

Ida Holland's eyes deepened.

"But where did you get the money?"

"I sold my boat."

It took a moment for her to be sure the mist was gone from her eyes, and her voice would not shake.

"Man, man, you should not have done that! You are getting such a fine start, and maybe the land is not worth it, after all."

"Oh, but it is!" he declared triumphantly. "I looked into that first. You see, Townsend did not have the remotest idea who you were—and did not care. He merely bought up a mortgage given by one Ida Holland, and promptly closed that mortgage on the land. He could not take title until the end of the year, but as the time passed and he heard never a word from this poor, foolish woman who had sunk her money in bay land he felt so absolutely sure that it was secure he entered into a contract with the Sheldon Boat Building Company to sell it to them—and guaranteed he would furnish good title.

"He could have done so in three more days, but there is many a slip between the twenty-eighth and the first."

"And the land is really mine again? What are we going to do with it?" She was immediately planning.

"There are two things we can do. First, Townsend will pay you ten thousand cash for it."

"Ten thousand!" The girl who had tried six months to save thirty dollars went pale and put her hand up to her side. "Not really ten thousand dollars?"

Clayton nodded. "But I don't think you better take it. The boat company was to give him twelve thousand dollars in stock. I think you better carry out his contract and take the stock."

"But are you sure the stock is worth money?" She was doubtful.

"Yes, you can sell it at par—a little more or less. But I think you better keep it. You can borrow ten thousand on it."

"Look here!" she broke in emphatically. "Why do you keep saying 'you?' Say 'we.' Don't you know that all of this money is due to you? I would have lost every cent of it. You must have half at least."

"Yes," he smiled, "I'm willing at least to borrow half of it, or more. Now here is what I have in mind: I am not afraid to hit into real things any more, and you never have been. But neither of us want to be broke again. Suppose we take that stock. It is now paying twenty per cent; borrow ten thousand dollars on it at eight per cent. We will put a thousand dollars apiece in the bank, so that no matter how things go neither of us will be broke. Then let's take the eight thousand dollars and undertake something big."

"I'm with you," she said warmly. "What is it you have up your sleeve?"

"I have been investigating this despised fish—the tuna. I have asked a hundred people who say it is no good, and not one has ever tried it. We have tried it and liked it. Let us make the whole country like it. We can get the Bay Sardine Company's canning

plant for three thousand dollars, and two thousand will put it in shape to can tuna. We'll take Helms in and give him some stock. I'll catch the tuna, Helms will can it, and you go East and introduce it. You can take Madge along as a helper. She is a good cook, and would make a good demonstrator.

"It is a risk. The fish may not go, and if it does not we'll be stuck with the canning factory; we will be pretty sure to lose the eight thousand. There is a good, big risk. But if it goes we'll be in at the very beginning of introducing a new food.

"Now if you were a woman unacquainted with business, or one who loves ease above everything else, I would not even suggest this; I would say sell the stock and lend the money on real estate at six per cent.

"Perhaps that would be best even for you. You are the judge. But if you want to fight for a big stake with me—well, you are a good saleswoman—there is a hungry or half-hungry world waiting out there, and you have a brand-new fish as good as any that ever came out of the sea to offer. What do you say?"

"Say?" She laughed enthusiastically. "Why, the world is ours, and it is going to eat tuna if I have to stuff it down its throat."

VII.

There may be a great deal of virtue in fighting a losing fight, but there is not any fun. The joy of fighting is the prospect of victory.

There were many times during the next eight months when both Rand Clayton and Ida Holland called themselves fools, but they never called each other that.

The season was almost over when Clayton and Helms got the Bay Sardine factory ready to can tuna. But Rand managed to get a few tons of the fish—enough for forty thousand cans. This would be sufficient for the winter campaign of vindication for the despised albacore.

Ida Holland, with Madge as assistant, had taken a thousand of the choicest cans to New York. She had been in the East two months, and had not called for any more.

In December, Clayton himself started on the road to try to create a market for tuna.

But a new fish is hailed with about the same delight as a social climber who hasn't anything to offer but her society. One groceryman expressed it for all:

"What the devil do we want a new fish for? We got so many old ones the cans are rusting on the shelves."

Clayton tried chefs at hotels and cafés; tried women's clubs and even charity suppers, but none of them cared to experiment with a new fish. A cook is like a stand-pat doctor—she knows how many pinches of this and that go into all the old formulas, and does not want to be bothered with new ones.

Seven thousand cans of tuna were left with different dealers, however, to be sold on commission or returned at Clayton's expense.

In March his total checks from sales amounted to twenty-one dollars and sixteen cents. But what troubled him most, no orders were coming from the East. He had staked his faith on Ida Holland's cleverness, ability, and persistency. From the start he had counted on her making the market for tuna.

The first of June came, and all the money was gone and the Tuna Canning Company was running in debt—fifty dollars here, a hundred there. The agreement had been that Helms was to have straight salary equal to what he had been getting with the Occidental Company and ten per cent of the stock besides. Paying the salary and the expenses of his partner and her assistant in the East had eaten into Clayton's personal thousand-dollar reserve. But he had not written anything of this to Ida Holland. Her work had shown a little result in May—a few scattering orders from New York, Kansas City, Boston, Washington, and Philadelphia. But all of them very small and from individual retail dealers; one hundred dozen was the largest, and altogether

amounting to less than two thousand cans.

At this rate the world might in time learn to eat tuna, but it would be long after Rand Clayton had been ground through the mill of bankruptcy and come out dry, broken waste.

The tuna were running. He had a fleet of five boats organized—the fishermen were anxious to quit yellowtail and catch the more plentiful albacore—the factory was ready to can twenty-five thousand cans a day. All they needed was a market!

The first week Rand drew the last of his reserve to pay the most pressing bills. Once more he was at the end of his row.

That night he found a letter at the hotel from Ida Holland. She always wrote once a week or oftener:

DEAR PARTNER: I've got a confession to make. I have been so sure tuna is a good fish, and so exasperated that I could not get hold of the right people to convince, that I tried advertising. I spent my one thousand dollars' reserve. Now, well, I am about as rich as I was that night in the cafeteria. If you have it, will you wire me five hundred dollars? I hate to give up now. This fish has to go. We can't lose after putting everything in. Can we? Write me again that you know I will succeed.

Rand went to his bank next morning, and partly by bluff and partly through friendship induced them to lend him five hundred dollars. He wired this to Ida Holland, with a line:

Of course you'll succeed.

Then he went down to the wharf and got into a Jap's fishing boat and went out to sea.

That night Clayton sat out on the deck after the other fishermen were asleep. The sea was so still that it scarcely rocked the boat. The wind from the southwest seemed filled with strange, far-off sensations. There was no fog to-night, and the stars thrust at the sea long, dim spears of light.

Rand was not afraid of life any more, but he was tired; his head ached with the everlasting figuring and hoping and scheming to hold out a little longer. He did not mind for himself so very much. For a long time he had steeled himself to face failure.

"It is not so hard to be broke, for one can always work for a meal," he remembered her saying.

He bit his lip hard to keep it from quivering. That poor girl who had fought and fought all her life, and now, when she had had security, an assured living, he had taken it—and lost it!

He could not stand that. It aroused the savagery in him, a feeling of revolt, the old, destructive anger that made him want to hurt something. And yet what could he do? The money was gone. He was running into debt; owed five hundred dollars at the bank. The old canning factory might be operated for yellowtail, but the prices were so low there was no possibility of success—for they were not equipped to compete with the Occidental. There was nothing for it but to throw up the whole business.

When he returned, two days later, the boat had not even got half a catch of yellowtail. Helms met him at the pier.

"Townsend has been to see you twice," he said, "and left word for you to come to his office at once."

"I will not do it," declared Clayton doggedly. "If you like, you can telephone him that I'm back. If he wants to see me, he can come to the office."

At five Townsend, dressed immaculately, a geranium in his buttonhole, came picking his way across the dirt yards to the office of the Tuna Canning Company.

"I beg your pardon, Mister Clayton," he spoke with a supercilious, sneering politeness, "but I've got a little bill against you for the Los Angeles Iron Company—for some material. Let me see." He looked through some papers. "Yes, here it is—three hundred and seventy-four dollars and twenty-six cents."

Clayton sat looking past the little lawyer out toward the bay. The sun was hid; the fog was coming in.

"I'll attend to it soon," he said indifferently.

Townsend cleared his throat:

"Oh, I'm sorry, Clayton, but their instructions are, if it is not paid at once, for me to ask the court for a receiver. I regret taking any steps like that, but ——"

Clayton arose wrathfully.

"Take any steps you want to and be damned. But take steps out of my office, and stay out!

"Helms," Clayton said to his superintendent, "it is all up. I am to the end of my line. Find a job somewhere else."

"I'm sorry, Clayton." Helms got up and took his coat off the hook. "It is too bad, for it looked like a good thing. But one never can tell. Good-by!"

Clayton sat in a half stupor and watched him across the yards. The telephone rang, and he jumped.

VIII.

The most discouraging thing in the world is to convince people and then have them do nothing about it. Ida Holland, with Madge as assistant, demonstrated the new fish in stores, cafés, and hotels—and convinced scores of them that tuna was good food. But nothing came of it. Some of them took an order of a dozen cans or so; others promised to order later. But most of them merely made a memorandum of it, and perhaps later included in their next order to the jobber—"2 doz. cans tuna."

The jobber wrote in reply: "We have no canned tuna in stock." If the dealer persisted in his quest of tuna to the extent of a second order, the jobber promised to get it for him, then reported a few days later: "There is no tuna on the market."

That ended it.

"Madge," said Ida Holland one day early in the spring, "it is like swimming in a sea of feathers. I just get desperate. Everybody is polite to us. They like the fish. 'Yes, yes; it is good,' they say when we cook it and put it in their mouths. But they don't buy it. What is the matter?"

Madge shook her head dubiously. "Search me! I think every time we pull off a big demonstration we have set the world on fire, but I don't smell any tuna frying afterward. I guess people love new clothes, but old foods. That's why ham and eggs never go out of style."

"It looks to me," insisted Ida, "as if people would be glad to try a new food and that the dealers would be quick to take it up and push it. Think what it would mean! Millions and millions of tuna running up and down the sea going to waste, while one can would keep a family from being hungry a whole day. Fish is not only one of the best, it is the most economical of all foods. You don't have to turn fish out to pasture nor feed them corn and oats nor keep a hired man to water them and drive them into the barn at night. A fish takes care of himself, takes no room, and eats nothing that is of any use to us or any other animal.

"If I were the people," concluded Ida earnestly, "when anybody discovered a new fish, instead of saying, 'yes, yes, but give me pork,' I would declare a half holiday and take a can of it along for my picnic supper."

The middle of May, Ida Holland was still fighting desperately to convince the people of the East that albacore was a good fish. She was an excellent saleswoman, pleasing, resourceful, persistent. But all of it seemed wasted when the dealers would assure her enthusiastically they were convinced—and still no orders reached her partner back in San Diego.

It was the thought of Rand that drove her on. He had built such great hopes on this venture; he had trusted her and believed in her. Now, after a whole winter of expense for her and Madge—and the expense had run to over fifteen hundred dollars—she simply must not fail.

She had begun to see what was the trouble: One dealer forgot all about tuna before she got the next one convinced, and what orders went in were mere scattered driblets that did not prompt any wholesaler to stock the

goods. It was not really a problem of salesmanship. She could have gone on the road and sold tuna. But that would have been merely one straw in the new broom. To run a factory, they must convince a lot of people at once. She must get the men, or at least one man at the top of the food business interested enough to act—to take hold and push this fish.

But how to do that was yet to be discovered.

"We will have to start an advertising campaign," she said to Madge one evening. "Do you think that your young advertising man you met at Hilman's has any ideas?"

"He sure has," declared Madge warmly. "Paul's got sense, even if he has got one of those old family tree things you hear so much about when you haven't got one of your own."

"Then," asked Ida, "will you spare me thirty of his valuable minutes, the next time he comes to see you?"

"I'll think about it," said Madge with mock grudging.

"How much money have you to spend on advertising?" asked the advertising man when Ida Holland had sought his advice.

"Not over five hundred dollars," she replied.

Paul whistled. "That won't go far—in New York." He studied a bit. "Well, if one hasn't much money, he must substitute wit. We shall think up some advertising idea that is worth money, but does not cost anything.

"Good advertising," he continued, "fixes the mind on one particular point. If we can get a point that is easy to see and hard to forget, we save a lot of money. What do you consider the strongest talking point in your new fish?"

"That it makes an excellent chicken salad," answered Miss Holland.

"Then we must somehow advertise it as a substitute for chicken." Again he puckered his face in an effort to catch some elusive phrase.

"I have it!" he exploded. "Came on the spur of the moment. Had to think of it quick to keep Madge from getting impatient to start to the show. Everybody that has ever been a kid remembers what an enormous amount of necks and backs and wings there are about chickens. We'll advertise your fish as the 'Neckless Chicken.' 'Have you tried the neckless chicken?' 'A salad of neckless chicken is better than a chicken without salad.' That will be a catchword worth ten thousand dollars in getting the people to know tuna. I give it to you free—if you'll let Madge and me go now."

"Go!" Miss Holland laughed in the reaction of sudden hope. "Go—you wingless chickens—and let me get to work."

Two days later Ida tracked down the elusive advertising man and laid before him a newspaper clipping recounting the arrangements for a banquet to the five thousand members of the Eastern Grocerymen's Association.

"I want an introduction to the chairman of that committee on arrangements," said Ida Holland determinedly.

"Waggler," said Paul. "I think I can arrange it. I know him slightly."

"I want it arranged for twelve-fifteen, just before he goes to lunch," said the girl.

"I'll do my bit," promised Paul.

When Ida Holland entered the office of Waggler, junor member of the Waggler-Crawford Wholesale Grocery Company, she bore in her hands a small plate daintily covered with a napkin.

"I'm not an agent," she said with her friendliest smile, "nor do I belong to the poison squad. But I have here a chicken salad I want to recommend for your grocer's banquet."

She uncovered the plate; there was a silver fork at the side, and set it before him. He tasted it. Having an appetite, he ate it all.

"It is good," he said. "But what do you get out of it? Why recommend this particular chicken salad?"

"Because," smiled the girl, "it is made of fish."

"Fish!" He was astonished. "It fooled me all right."

Then she convinced him how novel

and interesting it would be to give it to the grocers at their banquet.

Waggler got the idea.

Between then and Friday, Ida Holland managed to meet and have a talk with the toastmaster.

The night of the banquet Ida Holland hovered about the door of the big hall through which the guests were to be served. She and Madge had personally superintended the making of the salad, but she was on needles and pins lest it fail some way. Somebody might not like it and start a criticism, or they might merely eat it and think no more about it.

Staking the last dollar of the five hundred Rand had wired her on the venture, she had inserted short reader advertisements in the morning papers about "Tuna—the neckless chicken."

This banquet to-night was the very last hope. If the salad failed to stir in these grocers a buying interest, then the game, or rather the fish, was up.

She could not resist edging into the hall in the shelter of some of the waiters to watch when the salads were served.

Her heart beat thumpingly when she saw, as the service was being removed, that nearly all the salad plates were empty.

The eating was over; the smoking began. The toastmaster, after a few humorous quips about the dinner, asked: "How did you like your chicken salad?"

"Fine!" was the general response.

"Well, gentlemen, you fellows are easier fooled than your customers. It was not chicken; it was fish—a new fish. 'Tuna, the neckless chicken,' introduced into New York by a California girl."

There was a general laugh and clapping. And some one shouted:

"Where is that neckless-chicken chicken? Bring her in!"

And amid much hilarity, Ida Holland was discovered and dragged forward and made to stand up on a chair.

Then they yelled: "Speech! Speech!"

The girl felt the blood in her face and neck burn and her heart beat frightenedly. She never had made a speech in her life, but everything was at stake on this night.

"Gentlemen," she said, and they got quiet, "I can't speak. But remember this: Every time you sell a customer a can of 'Neckless Chicken' you save the country a pound of beefsteak—or four pounds of corn and cackle." And as Ida Holland dodged out of the room her heart beat wildly, for she was sure that roar of laughter and clapping meant the night's work would bear fruit and sell fish.

IX.

"This is the Western Union," said the voice at the other end. "Have a message for you."

"Read it," Clayton directed indifferently.

"It is from New York—dated June 6th. 'Quote lowest price on one hundred thousand dozen one-pound cans Silver Brand Tuna—f. o. b. San Diego. Waggler Wholesale Grocery Company.'"

"Helms! Helms!" Clayton shouted, running after his foreman. "Come back!"

After excited figuring for half an hour, Helms announced positively:

"We can deliver them at a cost of seven and three-quarter cents a can. Maybe less. That is certain to cover all possible costs. Better offer them at eight and a half cents."

"No," said Clayton. "If they buy, it will be because of the quality and not the price." He took up the phone and called the Western Union, and sent a telegram quoting one dollar and twenty-five cents a dozen—if accepted within forty-eight hours.

Clayton slept little that night, and fairly haunted the Western Union office with inquiries next morning for telegrams.

At two-thirty in the afternoon, he and Helms sat in the office, waiting with nervous anxiety that scarcely permitted of connected conversation. The

telephone rang. Clayton jumped and grabbed the receiver.

"Western Union. Message for you."

"Read it!" ordered Clayton, breathing hard.

"New York, June 7th. Accept quotation on one hundred thousand dozen cans Silver Brand Tuna. Ship at once. Waggler Wholesale Grocery Company."

"Oh, it's going big, Ida!" he exclaimed, as they drove from the station to the factory. It was the last of June, and he had wired for her to come back; they were already swamped with orders. "We are canning twenty-five thousand cans a day and clearing three cents a can. If the tuna run as late as last year, we'll clear seventy-five thousand dollars before Thanksgiving.

"And, Ida"—he was so jubilant he did not notice that he had reached over and taken both her hands and was squeezing them between his—"I'll tell you my ambition: In five years from now there will be twenty factories on the coast canning tuna, and we will own ten of them, turning out a million cans a day."

T. Edgerton Townsend sat by his office window, reading a work on torts.

T. Edgerton had been getting a little seedy the last year. Practice was not rushing. Somehow he had lost one by one his profitable attorneyships—that of the Sheldon Boat Building Company being first, and his real-estate investments had turned out badly.

Finally he reached for his hat, and went out, saying to himself:

"I've got to make friends with that —that plunger whether I want to or not."

Rand greeted him in a good-natured, friendly way. Plainly he no longer felt any animosity.

"What about your attorneys? Do you need any legal assistance in any of your companies?" T. Edgerton spoke with trepidation.

"We do need a regular attorney. I'll consider you."

This was a time he had worked and waited for.

"By the way"—Clayton waved his hand—"you haven't seen our new home on Mission Hills. Ida and I would be glad for you and the missus to drop in to dinner to-night."

"We'll be very glad to come," said T. Edgerton, breathing with relief at the prospect of increasing his income.

It took a lot of bullying for T. Edgerton to force his blue-blooded, arrogant wife to consent to dine with a woman "who was once our hired girl!"

It was a nice house—furnished in excellent taste—and the dining room had a bright cheerfulness that gave one a happy appetite for both food and fellowship.

Ida Clayton was a natural, and, therefore, gracious hostess.

The four were seated. There was a fifth plate—and a vacant chair.

"You are expecting other company?" Mrs. Townsend could not resist inquiring.

"Yes," answered Rand. "A young woman that we esteem very highly—both because of her skill and personality."

Just then Madge came in with the soup. After serving the guests and Mr. and Mrs. Clayton, she seated herself at the vacant place at the table.

"Mrs. Townsend," said Rand with bland politeness, "allow me to introduce to you, Madge Willford—our hired girl."

Mrs. Townsend's face flamed redder than it had ever been before, and she made an instinctive move to rise with indignation, but her husband caught her eye, and she stuck.

"Oh, by the way, Mrs. Townsend," said Ida Clayton sweetly, "I suppose of course your brother Paul has told you of his engagement?"

"No." The surprise momentarily diverted Mrs. Townsend's mind from her humiliation.

"He and Madge are to be married Wednesday," said Ida Clayton. Then glancing with a warm smile at Madge, she turned back to Mrs. Townsend and asked innocently:

"Has Paul always been the lucky member of your family?"

The Way of the White Man

By Ralph Stock

Author of "South of the Line," Etc.

III.—THE PRETENDERS

FELISI squatted on the beach of Luana, the center of a group of chattering female relatives, watching the men launch the big canoe with many cries and much unnecessary puffing and straining.

They were showing off in front of their womenfolk, a weakness not uncommon in other places than the beach of Luana, as Felisi knew, and while the female relatives clucked their admiration her own wise eyes took in the scene with no other emotion than pleasurable excitement at the prospect of leaving the taro patch and the fish trap for the mysterious lures of the outside world that she had glimpsed while selling imitation pink coral on the wharf at Levuka.

Felisi was going away. She was dressed in her most modest blue wrapper, and beside her on the sand reposed her simple but effective trunk, a kerosene tin cut neatly in half and lashed together with sinnet.

The whole family was going away; it was an upheaval, a cataclysm, and the cause of it all was ambition—nothing less. Among other fatal maladies that the ubiquitous white man in his wisdom had seen fit to inflict on the inhabitants of "The Islands of the Blest," this thing ambition had seized on Felisi's family like a plague. Money had come to Luana—copper and silver and gold—and it was discovered that these unlovely disks of metal were not without their uses. For instance, in sufficient quantities they could be exchanged for articles that it was beyond the power of Luana to produce. Had not Felisi brought back from her historic pilgrimage to Levuka a sewing machine from Americania and a mouth organ?

And now it was a boat. Nothing would satisfy Felisi's father but a boat that he had seen in Levuka. Apparently it could do anything but talk, and he was not altogether certain it was not capable of that. It would carry five times as much produce to market as the big canoe, and in half the time. It—but Felisi had forgotten the category of its virtues. The fact remained that it was necessary to collect sufficient gold disks to buy the boat—fifty in all—and, as usual, the womenfolk were called upon to do the collecting. Felisi's mother was going to be scullery maid in a boarding house where she happened to know the cook. Her aunt was to lend local color to a native curio dealer's shop on the parade, and various female cousins were going to help in a Samoan laundry. Even a male cousin had condescended to become a wharf porter for a month or two. The remainder of the male element was going to be busily engaged in keeping the home fires burning, or its equivalent, and the result of their combined efforts was to be—the boat.

It *had* occurred to one of Felisi's aunts—a woman with far too much to say, as her husband had often remarked—to ask why it was necessary to carry five times as much produce to market in half the time, and the answer accorded her by Felisi's father was unusually tolerant:

"To make still more gold disks, of course."

She then actually had the temerity to inquire why it was necessary to make more gold disks when, for countless

generations, they had succeeded in living quite comfortably without any disks at all. But this was too much. Felisi's father had snorted violently, and changed the subject.

And Felisi, silent, wise-eyed? As well as a sewing machine from Americania and a mouth organ, she had brought back from Levuka an unrivaled knowledge of the white man and his tongue. Every one prophesied a great future for Felisi of Luana.

Meanwhile, and not so very far away, a certain Mrs. Caton leaned over a certain breakfast table on the Rena River, and said: "Jack!"

It was the second time she had addressed her husband without being noticed, but she was used to it.

"Wake up, old boy!" she added without resentment. "I have something really startling to say."

Mr. Caton, an old-young man with sparse, sandy hair and a preoccupied air, lifted his red-ocher face from a plate of toast and honey, and blinked. Also he smiled, the kindliest possible smile.

"I beg your pardon, my dear; say on."

"I don't like house boys," announced Mrs. Caton.

"You don't like house boys," repeated her husband dazedly; then, after wiping his mouth and drawing his coffee cup a trifle nearer: "What do you intend to do about it?"

"They're all right for waiting and that sort of thing," continued Mrs. Caton, "but as personal servants they're —ugh!—too creepy, crawly. They remind me of a snake. Besides, I want some sort of female companionship in the house, something in the nature of a lady's maid."

"Something in the nature of a lady's maid," murmured Mr. Caton. If his wife had said she wanted a rhinoceros and two antimacassars in the house, he would have repeated the suggestion in exactly the same way. Mrs. Caton knew this husband of hers, and she still loved him, which is, of course, part of the miracle.

"My dear Jack," she cried, "do please try and show some interest, just for a minute, in something besides the *Corona Catoni*. I know it's going to be the most wonderful thing that ever happened, but I'm afraid you've got *me* at present."

For answer Mr. Caton rose, leaving a slice of thickly buttered toast to be inundated by the slowly encroaching honey on his place, and, deliberately placing his chair beside his wife's, sat down. Her hand—white as the tablecloth—was resting beside the sugar basin, and her husband's strong brown one closed over it.

"Joan," he said gently, "please don't say things like that. They hurt. And you know they're not true."

"Yes, I know," Mrs. Caton laughed softly, "but you take such a lot of rousing, Jack. I have to start like a Penny Dreadful: 'The duchess lay on the divan, stabbed to the heart,' or something like that before you take any interest."

"My dear child, I *am* interested," protested Mr. Caton earnestly, "and here I am to prove it. Let me see; what was it you wanted?"

His wife's laughter rang out as she withdrew her hand and placed it on his.

"You funny old thing! I said I didn't like a house boy as a personal servant, and I want something in the nature of a lady's maid. Something feminine about the house, you know."

"Ah, to be sure!" Mr. Caton thought deeply. "How about Mrs. Herbert? She might——"

"My dear, I said a lady's maid. Mrs. Herbert would like to hear you say that."

"Then it will have to be a native of some sort. How about an Indian woman?"

"Too much like a house boy. No, I think I should like an islander. A country girl for preference. I don't like those town-bred natives; they're sly."

"But she won't be able to speak English."

Mrs. Caton toyed with the sugar tongs. "No, there is that." Then she looked up. "Never mind," she added

brightly. "I'll teach her; it will be something to do."

Mr. Caton leaned forward in his chair. He was aware, and not for the first time, that his wife was not looking as she had looked during the early days on the Rena River, a short three years ago. It troubled him vaguely.

"Joan," he said, his kind gray eyes searching her pale face, "you're not looking well."

Mrs. Caton rose slowly, and went over to the veranda doorway, looking out on the vivid green banks of the Rena River.

"No?" she queried lightly.

"No," repeated her husband. "How about a run home?"

Mrs. Caton turned with an eager light in her eyes.

"Let's see, how long is it——"

"Three years," she supplied.

"Three years!" Her husband looked positively alarmed. "Good gracious, I had no idea!"

"Hadn't you?" said Mrs. Caton.

"Not the faintest. You must go, Joan; that's all there is to it. You *must* go—and you know how you'll enjoy it."

The light had faded from Mrs. Caton's eyes. She leaned listlessly against the door jamb.

"How about you, Jack?" she suggested.

"I?" Her husband laughed his deep-toned laugh. "Oh, I'm as strong as a horse, and there's still something that must be done."

"*Still* something?"

"Yes, I'll tell you all about it some time if it doesn't bore you, but I *must* stay a bit longer—everything hangs on it—then we'll go home for good."

Mrs. Caton had turned again to the river to hide her longing.

"Roll on the day," she said briskly.

"You're not unhappy here, Joan?"

She came over and put one white hand on her husband's shoulder.

"Unhappy!" she repeated, and laughed. It was a splendid laugh, a laugh for an actress to be proud of.

"You know what they said, Joan."

"Yes, I know what they said. And they were wrong. Hasn't three years proved it?"

Her husband pushed back his chair and got up. He took her two hands in his and kissed her.

"And you'll go?" he pleaded, holding her from him.

"No," answered Mrs. Caton. "I don't want to go—yet."

"It's foolish of you," he told her, and turned toward the door.

"I shall have my 'lady's maid' to play with," laughed Mrs. Caton.

"I'll see about it this afternoon when I go to town," her husband called back to her from the veranda.

He stepped out into the blinding sunlight, and passed up the pathway toward the bush house. Mrs. Caton noticed a piece of bass hanging out of his duck jacket pocket. He was going to "tinker with the orchids." She sighed, and turned back into the living room.

And that was why, three days later, Felisi of Luana came to the bungalow on the banks of the Rena River.

"Something in the nature of a lady's maid" appeared in a neat blue wrapper, and accompanied by a kerosene tin trunk lashed with sinnet. Mrs. Caton fell in love with her on the instant, and though Felisi's regard for Missus Catoni was less emotional it was none the less sincere. She thought this white woman the most beautiful thing she had ever seen, with her coral-white skin, dark eyes, and hair of an indescribable color. As a matter of fact, it was auburn, and it was Felisi's chief delight to comb it morning and evening. She found her duties extraordinarily light—Missus Catoni treated her as a companion rather than a servant—and Felisi was earning five shillings a week—two large silver disks toward the fifty gold ones needed for the wonderful boat.

"Felisi," said her mistress one evening during the hair-combing rites, "do you know you have beautiful hair, and still more beautiful eyes, perfect teeth, and an almost perfect figure?"

"Yes," Felisi answered with refreshing candor.

Missus Catoni laughed.

"Then that's all right," she said. "I thought perhaps you didn't." She looked into the reflection of Felisi's soft brown eyes in the glass. "I believe you know a good deal more than you pretend," she added thoughtfully.

"Me know some," admitted Felisi modestly.

"And do you have to pretend much, Felisi?"

"Some time."

"Why?" Missus Catoni was never tired of plumbing the depths—or as near the depths as she could get—of this quaint child-woman. It was like fishing in deep water; one never knew what strange thing would be brought to light. But, like all white folk, she had not the faintest idea that in the process she herself was being plumbed and to greater depths.

The indescribable hair was finished, and Felisi squatted on the matting of the floor to await further instructions. But Missus Catoni was in communicative mood.

"Why?" she repeated with quiet insistence.

Felisi shrugged her shoulders, a trick she had learned from watching a French lady on the wharf at Levuka, and one she had found effective.

"Pretend, him all right," she pronounced sagely. "Pretend him pink coral, no white coral, plenty more money. Pretend me very, very poor, an' tired an' know nothing, plenty heap more money."

Each one of these distressful symptoms was illustrated in tone and gesture with the instinctive faithfulness of a meke dancer. Missus Catoni was deeply interested.

"Yes, we all have to pretend sometimes, don't we?" she mused. "Most of us are actors. We have to be. Some are better at it than others, but most of us act."

"Act," repeated Felisi with faithful intonation. It was a new word. She was learning many new words on the Rena River.

"Yes, pretend. I used to pretend a lot at one time, Felisi. It was my living." Missus Catoni lit one of her toy cigarettes and leaned back in the chair. She was altogether beautiful, Felisi thought, with her white hands clasped behind her head, the folds of a softly tinted kimono falling about her, and the toy cigarette moving up and down between her lips as she talked. She was like white coral draped with tinted weed, deep down in a rock pool.

"I've pretended such a lot," she went on presently, more to herself than the girl squatting at her feet, "that I'm positively frightened when I have to do something real."

She turned in her chair, and seemed to see Felisi for the first time.

"Do you know," she said slowly, with a reminiscent light in her dark eyes, "I once had to pretend to be somebody else every evening for two whole years. It was a wonderful run, Felisi, and all because I pretended so well."

Missus Catoni smiled as though at some pleasant memory, while Felisi remained silent and still. She knew how to listen. And presently the other went on:

"Every evening it was the same. All sorts of carriages drove up to a very big house that was covered with colored lights, and people went inside—hundreds of them. They had to sit for a little time, listening to music or talking—most of them talked—in front of a big curtain. Then the curtain went up, and there was I on the stage, dressed up like somebody else. All the time they had been coming into the house and sitting, listening to the music, I had been in a little room downstairs putting on clothes and painting myself to look like somebody else, and now, there I was."

It was as though the footlights shone again on Missus Catoni. There was a light in her eyes that Felisi had never seen before.

"All alone?" prompted the audience.

"No, there were others there, all pretending; we pretended that we were afraid and that we were brave, that we were poor and rich, that we hated and we loved, and we pretended so well that the people sitting in front laughed with us and cried with us and some-

times forgot that they were sitting in a big house covered with lights and that we were only pretending. There would be quite a long silence after the curtain came down, and then the big house would ring with the clapping of hands, and we knew that we had pretended well."

Missus Catoni leaned back in the chair and sent thin ribbons of smoke to hover on the still air above her head. She was looking through and beyond the ribbons of smoke.

"It is the most wonderful thing in the world, Felisi," she said slowly, and added a moment later, "except one."

"An' him?" Felisi inquired.

Missus Catoni looked down at her and smiled.

"You don't miss much, do you, child?" she said in a changed voice. "I can't tell you about 'him' so easily, and besides you'll know all about him one day, I expect."

But Felisi was not appeased. Something was troubling her, as Missus Catoni saw by her puckered forehead, and at last it found utterance:

"Why you no go on plenty more big house, plenty more pretend?"

"I met Mr. Caton," said his wife, a whimsical smile hovering about her mouth and eyes as she looked down on Felisi.

"An' Missi Catoni, him no like pretend?"

Missus Catoni laughed outright.

"If you're not the quaintest thing, Felisi!" she said. "And you've hit the nail right on the very head. "Missi Catoni, him no like pretend!'" She laughed again. "You see," she explained, "people who can't pretend themselves, and don't understand it, are often very nice—the nicest sort of people somethimes, I think—but they don't like others who can pretend—especially their wives—to do it for a living; it—— Oh, dear, oh, dear, what am I talking to you about, Felisi? That will do now; you may go."

Felisi went, but still with a puckered brow. At the door, she turned back.

"You no scotty—angry?" she said with drooping head.

Missus Catoni was lying on the bed. "Good gracious no, child! Whatever makes you think that? It's only that I find myself telling you things that I don't always tell myself. It's your eyes, I think."

Felisi sank abruptly onto the matting of the floor.

"Me pretend!" she announced eagerly, and commenced to sway and gesture and drone the meke of the two wood pigeons, while Missus Catoni watched and applauded from the bed.

They had much in common, these two.

A few days later Missus Catoni opened a letter at the breakfast table, and when she had read the color surged to her face. She waited until it had subsided, then spoke in her usual subdued tone of voice:

"Jack, Tony Redgrave is in Suva."

Missi Catoni looked up and blinked as usual.

"Tony Redgrave," he repeated dully.

"Yes, you remember; he was leading man with me at the Olympic."

Missi Catoni winced, then smiled his kindly smile.

"Really?" he said. "What on earth is he doing in this part of the world?"

"He's just finished his Australian tour, and stopped off at Suva on his way to San Francisco."

"Jove!" exclaimed Missi Catoni with the first show of enthusiasm Felisi had seen him display. "That'll brighten things up for you a bit, Joan; I'll fetch him out this afternoon."

"To stay?"

Missus Catoni was playing with the sugar tongs.

"That's as you like, dear. How long is he stopping over for?"

"Until the next boat. About two weeks."

"Then he must stop here," said Missi Catoni with finality.

A room was prepared at once. A new mosquito bar was hung, and the most beautiful sheets spread on the bed. Missus Catoni flitted about the place like a white butterfly, giving a touch here and there. A whatnot with ten shelves was placed in a corner, and

Felisi longed to ask what it was for until Missus Catoni told her without asking.

"He is very fond of nice boots," she told Felisi. "You will see the most wonderful boots in the world presently."

"Missi Redgravie him big fellah?" Felisi inquired, and Missus Catoni went off into peals of laughter.

"Oh, I must tell him that!" she cried. "Felisi, you're a gem! Yes, Missi Redgravie is a big fellah in his own way."

And that was all Felisi heard about him until he appeared—or rather made his entry—at three o'clock that afternoon. He was tall and slim, and wore the most beautiful white flannel suit and white felt hat Felisi had ever seen, even on the wharf at Levuka. His hair shone like a calm sea at night. There was a knifelike crease down his trousers, which terminated in the wonderful boots. These were long and square-toed, and the rich brown color of the sitting-room table.

Felisi saw him coming down the path from the launch, followed by Missi Catoni's ungainly figure and a couple of house boys carrying suit cases that were the same color as the boots. She saw him between the window curtains of Missus Catoni's bedroom, and when she turned from the enchanting vision her mistress was standing at the dressing table, with the little top left-hand drawer open and her hand hovering over it. In that drawer Felisi had once seen a pot of red stuff, and wondered what it was for, as Missus Catoni had never used it. Was the mystery to be solved? Evidently not, for she laughed, a little, nervous laugh, and shut the drawer with a snap.

A moment later she was on the veranda.

"Joan," said a well-modulated voice, "this is most awfully good of you——"

After that the voices mingled, and Felisi busied herself with other matters.

They had tea on the veranda, a very pleasant tea by the sounds that floated in through the open windows. Even Missi Catoni laughed as Felisi had never heard him laugh, and the well-modulated voice droned on. Between the laughs came scraps of conversation that fascinated Felisi. It was like a puzzle that needed fitting together.

"You may as well know your *nom de Rena River,* Tony. It's Redgravie, nothing less; you see, their own words all end with a vowel. I am Missus Catoni, so you mustn't mind. The quaintest thing; I'll show you her later on."

"I hope you won't spoil her, Joan." This from Missi Catoni.

"Spoil her, my dear! She knows more than you or I or Tony here will ever learn. Sometimes her wisdom almost frightens me."

A little later Missi Catoni went away. Felisi conjured a mental picture of his ungainly figure going up the path to the bush house with a piece of bass hanging out of one pocket.

"Keen as ever," said the well-modulated voice.

"Oh, yes," Missus Catoni laughed softly, "there's going to be a *Corona Catoni* before long."

"And you? I hope you don't mind my saying it, Joan, but you're looking most awfully ill."

"Sorry I don't suit."

"No, but honestly—how long is it?"

"Three years."

"Three years—*here?*"

"Yes, we're going home for good soon."

"But—well, the sooner the better. Do you know I hardly recognized you this afternoon. It was the shock of my life."

"You've had so many shocks, haven't you, Tony? You hid your emotions very well."

"But you at the Olympic, and you here—good Heaven!"

"You needn't be tragic, Tony; I assure you there's no need. Besides, you hardly ever saw me out of my make-up."

"It was a great time." The well-modulated voice became reminiscent. "There's never been anything like it since."

"How did Nina Trueman turn out?"

A cane chair scraped on the floor.

"Frost! Hard and nipping. Fell to pieces—petered out after you left."

"And I can't help feeling glad even here. Isn't it horrid?"

"Not a bit. Oh, Lord, Joan——"

"Tell me about yourself. How did you find Australia?"

"Top hole. Big houses everywhere, but they're mighty hard to please. I rather like it; it means when you *have* got them you've done something. Nothing will induce them to book in advance, though. Empty house one minute and crammed to the ceiling the next. It's rather wearing. *Richard Dehan* fetched 'em, though, and Fred Walton in 'The Permit.' Never worked so hard in me life."

"This will rest you—— Boy! Whisky and sparklet ——"

"Yes, *this* will rest me if nothing would. By the way, Caton doesn't approve, does he?"

"Not for me. Otherwise he simply takes no interest, that's all."

"Funny," mused the well-modulated voice.

"Oh, I don't know. Why should he?"

"Well——"

"We do rather insist on it—I mean our profession—don't we?"

"Ah-ha! So you're going over——"

"Not a bit. I love it as much as ever. It's part of me."

"The bigger part?"

"No, not the bigger part. I'm sorry. Let's go for a stroll. You haven't seen the orchids."

"Orchids!" The well-modulated voice grew fainter as it moved down the veranda steps and out onto the pathway. "Tell me a few for Heaven's sake—the *Corello Mysterioso* or *Glorioso* or something. I must appear intelligent."

Missus Catoni laughed.

"There's no need whatever."

Then their voices passed out of range, and Felisi was left to fit her puzzle together.

For the next week she had little to do. Missus Catoni spent nearly all her time with Missi Redgravie. Occasionally Felisi used to go into the guest's bedroom and stand enthralled before the whatnot of boots. There were ten pairs of them, each perfect in its own way.

One evening—Missus Catoni had been playing the piano under the subdued pink light of the standard lamp, and Missi Redgravie was standing in the open doorway, looking out on the moonlit river. He turned and looked at her for a long time with a frown on his forehead. Suddenly an eager light came into his eyes, and he strode into the middle of the room.

"Drawing-room scene—second act," he said. "I come down O. P." He strolled toward the piano, and a pleading note came into his well-modulated voice. "Won't you sing, Di?"

And although Missus Catoni's name was not "Di," she looked up as she played, and said very softly: "For you, or the others?"

"For me."

She sang, but in the middle of it Missi Redgravie held up his hand. The music ceased, and they stood side by side, a look of terrible fear on their faces and their eyes turned toward the door. So great was their fear that Felisi, who had been squatting on the veranda, sewing, looked about her into the moonlit night to see who was there.

"He's coming," said Missi Redgravie in an awe-struck voice.

"Who—Paul?" whispered Missus Catoni. Her hand was on his sleeve.

"No—Desmond. I can hear him limping—limping——"

"You're dreaming." She had clutched his arm now, and her face was piteously upturned to his. Felisi longed to go and comfort her. "You must be dreaming. He ——"

"No, I am not dreaming." Missi Redgravie pronounced this in a firm voice. He seemed to have pulled himself together for a supreme effort. He looked brave, wonderfully brave. "I shall go and meet him."

"No, no!" Missus Catoni held him fast. "You cannot go, Tom——"

Now Felisi knew that Missi Redgravie's name was not Tom, and for her

the spell was broken. They were pretending, even as Missus Catoni had said. But what pretending! This, then, was what they did in the big house covered with lights. As a matter of fact, Felisi was seeing what the world would have given a fortune to see—Joan Trevor acting.

And they went on to the very end, to where the man called Tom took her in his arms. Then Missus Catoni flung away from him with a happy little laugh and subsided onto the sofa.

"Isn't it extraordinary how it all comes back?" she said in a changed voice.

"Comes back!" Missi Redgravie stood looking down on her. "It's never left you," he said gravely.

"But every word, like that. I never fluffed once. It must be all neatly tied up and put away in the corner of one's brain. It must be part of one. Oh, it's queer!" She passed her hand over her eyes with a weary little gesture.

"Yes," said the man; "the bigger part."

She smiled wistfully, and shook her head slowly, but firmly.

It was on just such an evening as this, with the tropical moonlight flooding the Rena River, that they pretended again.

Missi Catoni had gone on an orchid-hunting expedition into the interior the day before, and Felisi was squatting on the veranda mats, sewing. They were just as they had been, Missus Catoni playing the piano and Missi Redgravie looking out at the moonlight river. The stage was set. Felisi longed for them to pretend, and they did, but it was all much more subdued than it had been before, and somehow it made it all the more natural.

Presently Missi Redgravie crossed the room and stood beside Missus Catoni as she played. They talked so quietly that Felisi could not hear them for a time. Then the music trailed away and left a voice, a well-modulated voice, talking quite clearly:

"This can't go on, Joan." They called each other by their proper names this time.

"It's my life, Tony," Missus Catoni answered him quietly.

"But you can't tell me that it is going on."

She turned on the piano stool and looked at him, and kept looking.

"It's the life I chose," she said.

"It's death," he told her. "You're dying on your feet, Joan. This is no country for a white woman. You know it. *He* knows it," he added bitterly. "Why, people don't bring their dogs here for fear of losing them. I—I can't stand by and see it."

"You needn't. I made my choice. I don't regret it."

"You can't tell me that you're happy—here."

"I can."

"You're making yourself say that. You don't believe it. Of all the ingrained, blind selfishness——"

"Hush!"

"No, I mean it."

"I know you mean it, but you don't understand."

"Understand! The pity of it—the waste of it. Oh, Joan, Joan——" His hands had seized hers. She sat quite still, looking at him with her dark eyes. It was wonderful.

"And you left in the middle of it all. There's the other half, the better half, waiting for you if you will only come back."

Missus Catoni's hands were suddenly snatched from his, and she stood up. Her breath was coming fast. The man stood before her.

"It can all be arranged. This is madness—pure madness. No one—not God—would ask it of you."

She stared at him as though fascinated.

"You—don't—understand," she said like one in a trance. "You could never—understand."

"There's only one thing I understand," he answered, and his arms went about her.

They stood quite still for a moment; then Missus Catoni, who faced the veranda door, gave a low cry and thrust him from her. Missi Catoni stood on the threshold, looking in, but he saw

nothing. A native boy led him by the hand. They had come so quietly that Felisi, engrossed in the pretending, had not heard them. The native boy led him forward into the room, and his disengaged hand swept the air until it met the back of a chair, and he sank into it.

"Joan!" he called. "Joan!" and laughed his deep laugh.

Missus Catoni crossed the room and sank on her knees, looking up into his face.

"Jack!" she said in a strange voice. "Jack, what has happened? Tell me!"

Again he laughed, and his hand caressed her hair.

"Bit of moon blindness, my dear," he said in his slow, cheerful voice. "Don't you worry. I shall be all right in a few days—a week at most. Often happens here, you know, but only to fools. I slept last night in the bush—without cover—and it must have worked round until it fell on me—in the shade when I fell asleep. Those confounded boys never woke me, and—and—here I am. Most extraordinary sensation. Just hand me a cigar, will you? Thanks, my dear. Where's Redgrave?"

Missi Redgravie came round in front of the chair.

"Here I am," he said.

"Ah, good! Here's a pretty pickle, Redgrave. Nice sort of host, eh? Leaves his guest for two days and comes back blind. Ha, ha!"

"Whisky and sparklet?" suggested Missi Redgravie.

"Ah, thanks! But I've got it, Joan!" He leaned forward, and his sightless eyes gleamed. "I've got it!"

"The *Corona Catoni?*" Missus Catoni's face lit up on the instant.

"Nothing less, my dear. And it's—it's—but I won't bore you about that. What will interest you most is that we're going home. Yes, I've been thinking things over while—while I've been like this, and this *is* an infernal country; there's no doubt about it. How you've stood it I don't know; do you, Redgrave?"

"No," said Missi Redgravie.

"Besides, there's the *Corona Catoni.*" Missi Catoni's tongue lingered over the words as though he loved them. "So we're going home—for good. Hope you'll come and see us, Redgrave."

"Thanks," said Missi Redgravie. "I should be charmed."

"And now I've got to get to bed somehow." Missus Catoni led him toward his bedroom door. "Steady, old girl; that's better. Good night, Redgrave. Hope you'll excuse me."

"Certainly. Good night," said Missi Redgravie.

He left that evening.

There would be no more pretending. Felisi was sorry. It had been so wonderful that it was almost impossible to tell where the pretending ended and the reality began.

Felisi often puckers her brow over it.

The next story in this series entitled "The Complete Beachcomber," will be in the POPULAR for May 20th.

THE COLONEL'S RESTLESSNESS

A NEW ENGLAND tourist, who was automobiling through Virginia, came into view one evening of a handsome old colonial home. Hailing a colored man who was passing down the road, the tourist shouted:

"Whose house is that, Henry?"

"Dat house b'longs to Cul'nel Culpepuh, suh," informed Henry.

"What is the colonel's occupation?"

"How's dat, boss?"

"What is the colonel's business? What does he do?"

"Aw, Lawd, boss, he don' do nothin' but sit in a rockin'-chair followin' de shade 'roun' de house an' drinkin' grass in his whisky."

Indigo Pete—and Ike

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "Waring of Sonoratown," "The Amazing Tenderfoot," Etc.

The town of Malachite witnesses the audacity of one who dares to rival the inimitable Pete

FOR a long week the stranger had terrorized the town of Malachite, and yet, strangely enough, no one had been killed or even wounded. There was some broken glass in the rear of the Forty Mile Saloon—odds and ends of bottles and glasses that the stranger had shot from the back of the bar while the assembled convivials had lain flat upon the floor praying inwardly that some one would happen along and assist the stranger to a farther clime.

And always, as a finale to his carelessly efficient gunwork, the stranger had hinted that it was time to "set 'em up again," which the bartender did, without protest and without remuneration.

Night after night the stranger rode into town from the rim of the desert, entered the saloon quietly, and as quietly slipped a buckskin sack from his shirt and deposited it on the bar. And each time he did so he asked the assembled company to join him in sampling the worst whisky that ever poisoned a bottle. Or at least so he said, and no one disputed his assertion. After the first drink he made a truly horrible face, as though about to expire in extreme agony, reached for his buckskin sack, and replaced it in his shirt and called for another round. The bartender never had the pleasure of inspecting the contents of the sack. Such was not the stranger's plan, as it developed later.

And after the second round the stranger, still maintaining that such whisky was primarily intended to clean old brass with, invariably called for another round.

About the fifth round he smiled, which made his face into a leathery map so absolutely unhuman and grotesque that he was named—secretly—"Horrible Ike." And by such name he was known in Malachite during his brief and lurid career.

A citizens' committee, meeting on the noon of the fourth day subsequent to Horrible Ike's arrival, decided that that gentleman would have to be suppressed, and unanimously elected the bartender, Brady, chairman of the anticipated obsequies, much to Brady's disgust. The committee, sternly intent upon the suppression of Horrible Ike, pointed out to Brady that he was the man most interested in the case. They volunteered their moral support and offered to loan him firearms and ammunition and pay the funeral expenses. Brady, handier with a bottle than a gun, demurred. A tenderly disposed citizen suggested that Brady poison Horrible Ike's whisky—but another citizen vetoed that suggestion with the remark that "such was impossible."

The committee, rising shortly before noon each day, and having little else to do, met regularly and as regularly disbanded to await the arrival of Ike at his usual hour, six o'clock. And be it said to his credit, he never disappointed them. In fact, they began to look forward to his coming with suppressed eagerness. Malachite had been dull for many moons, and Ike's nightly performance was the one bright spot in the desert monotony.

Had he been less persistent in shooting up the place as a grand finale to his act, he might be there to-day. But fate and Indigo Pete, riding side by side out of nowhere, brought peace to the fluttering environs of Malachite under that universal law that the antidote must be as strong or stronger than the poison.

It was the seventh evening of Horrible Ike's reign. Men drifted from their shacks to the saloon, drawn thither by an irresistible desire to see the play. They knew that they risked something in doing so, and yet Horrible Ike had thus far contented himself with shooting up bottles and glasses and otherwise damaging the interior of the Forty Mile bar.

Brady, seeing his stock of glassware diminishing, determined to assert himself that evening, and his preparations were simple. Early that afternoon he cached a sawed-off shotgun loaded with buckshot under the bar, and handed a signed check to his wife with the understanding that if he returned to his fireside without assistance he was to have the check back again, and if he did not, that Father O'Gorman was to officiate.

Horrible Ike arrived almost to the minute. It was noticed that he did not even proffer the buckskin sack to begin with, but strolled to the bar, waved his arm inclusively, and ordered the drinks. Brady, sweating in his collar, produced a bottle and glasses. The shotgun could wait. Horrible Ike's presence was conducive to peace, in one sense of the word; or at least Brady interpreted it that way.

Another round followed Ike's criticism of the whisky. Still Brady desisted from reaching for the shotgun. He thought of the check he had given his wife, and of Father O'Gorman and other things. Then he remembered that he had unloaded the shotgun and had cleaned it. Had he slipped the shells in it again? He was not too certain of that to make the chance worth a trial. Meanwhile, Horrible Ike consumed much whisky, bragged loudly of being the quickest man with a gun in the State, and backed his assertion with a shot which clipped the top from a decanter which had previously escaped his notice, and, as though to applaud his marksmanship, called for still another drink for himself and his friends—as he termed them. They drank, not caring to argue a sufficiency. And as they drank, the show took on a more pleasing aspect. What if Ike was disporting himself loudly and with intermittent punctuations of Brady's bar fittings? It didn't cost them anything, and Brady had been given his chance by a unanimous vote in committee to put a stop to the tinkle of glassware. It was up to him—and they, moreover, were saving money.

Horrible Ike smiled. Brady shivered and glanced down at his shotgun.

"Set 'em up again!" demanded Ike, gesturing toward the row of bottles back of the bar.

Brady shoved a bottle toward Ike, but the disturber shook his head. "They ain't straight," he said, indicating the still-untouched bottles on the shelf before the mirror. Brady shook inwardly and turned to rearrange the bottles preliminary to Ike's nightly target practice.

"Shove that one a leetle closter to the edge," insisted Ike, "and I'll show you how to bust 'em two at a lick."

"One at a time is fast enough for me," said Brady, stirred out of his usual caution.

"But it's Saturday night—good ole Saturday night!" explained Ike in a hurt tone. "You ain't goin' to spoil a good time, be you? You got all Sunday to clean up." And Ike beamed as though he had conferred a large and generous favor.

Just then a horseman entered. Ike, with gun poised, hesitated and glanced at the new arrival.

"Go ahead with the fireworks," said Indigo Pete. "Don't mind me. All I want is a drink."

Brady, hoping for the best, so far forgot himself as to seize the bottle on the bar and transfer it and a clean glass to Indigo Pete's vicinity. Horrible Ike lowered his gun, spat disgustedly, and surveyed Pete.

"Come far, stranger?" he queried.

"Far as I could," said Pete succinctly, eying Ike from beneath brows contracted and stern.

"I admire to say you're wrong," asserted Ike.

Two or three of the citizens wisely left the saloon. They were not thirsty at the moment.

"Meanin'?" And Pete tipped the bottle and poured himself a man-size drink.

"That there's room to ride—and to keep a-ridin'," said Ike, nodding toward the doorway.

"Did you sell out?" queried Pete, leaning toward Brady.

"Sell out! To who?"

"Why, to the gent with the gun in his hand. Looks like he owned the outfit."

Another citizen, noting the hour, decided to retire toward home.

"No, I ain't sold out—but I'm willin'."

"Uh-uh! Business bad?"

"Some."

"Don't look so bad," said Pete, downing his drink with a quick twist of his wrist. "'Cept your scenery looks some tired. Who's been decoratin' your lookin'-glass?"

Brady glanced at Ike. "Oh, the boys gits frisky at times."

"Uh-uh! Any boy in particular?"

"You said it!" thundered Horrible Ike. "Stranger, look at me and see the last livin' representative of the noble art of handlin' a gun. Don't git scared, for I don't aim to damage you none. Men what sees me shoot know they ain't got time to git scared when I draw. And afore you fork your cayuse and fly I'm goin' show you why. Don't cost a picayune cent—and the drinks throwed in. These gents can tell you. Shoot? Say, hombre, I kin shoot the rattles off a snake when he's buzzin', and nick 'em one at a time. What I been showin' these gents is jest a sample of what I kin do when I git warmed up. Take that there glass you jest set down on the bar. Now you see it and now she's gone." And the stranger's arm swung up. The glass disappeared and Horrible Ike dropped his gun hand. "Which is plumb amachoor work, but it keeps my hand limber."

Indigo Pete, leaning easily against the bar, nodded. "You couldn't 'a' missed—at that range. Let's see you do some real shootin'."

Horrible Ike gazed about and noted a citizen asleep at the switch in a chair by the wall. A half-smoked cigar hung loosely from the citizen's mouth. Ike barely hesitated as he pulled down. The cigar flirted from the citizen's lips, and a .45 punctured the wall. The citizen's head jerked up. He came to with a start, fumbled in his pocket for a match, and lighted it. He seemed quite perplexed when he discovered that there was no cigar to apply the match to, and, murmuring something about "shigar no good, anyhow," sank again into blissful slumber.

Indigo Pete smiled scornfully. There were, according to Pete's reckoning, still three shots in Ike's gun. "Coarse work," he asserted, and tapped the bar, calling attention to the fact that he wanted a glass.

Horrible Ike's moth-eaten mustache bristled. Possibly the new arrival would appreciate something a little more local. And as Pete, apparently oblivious to the other's presence, raised his glass, Horrible Ike drew down and shot it from his fingers. Pete wiped his hand on his overalls and asked Brady for another glass. But instead of pouring himself a drink, Pete poised the glass in his hand.

"Try her," he said, and tossed the glass in the air.

Horrible Ike fired—and missed. His eyebrows lifted in an expression of astonishment. The glass struck the floor edge down and rolled toward the wall. Ike, wishing to redeem himself, threw a shot at the glass and shattered it.

"Light's bad," said Ike, by way of apology. "Reckon she needs trimmin'." And he pulled on the hanging lamp above the bar, but the hammer of his gun clicked on an empty cylinder.

Indigo Pete turned to Brady. "I reckon it's your turn," he said drawlingly.

Brady evidently thought so, for he reached down and straightened with the sawed-off shotgun leveled at Ike's chest. "I call your hand," he said, nodding toward Ike's bulging shirt front. Slowly Ike reached in his shirt and pulled out the buckskin sack. Slowly he relinquished it, and Brady swept it into his pocket.

Ike looked hurt. "You call that treatin' a gent white?" he whined.

"The house is yours," said Brady, lowering the gun. "But no more fancy shootin'." Even in his trepidation of soul, Brady had not overlooked the weight of the sack as he slid it into his pocket.

Ike holstered his empty gun. "The curtain is down," he said lugubriously. "And I was only beginnin' to warm up. Let's have a drink."

Ike drank and smiled. Indigo Pete, no Apollo himself, felt that he was handsome in comparison. He slouched carelessly along the bar until within a few feet of Ike. "You was tellin' about your gunwork, hombre. Seein' as how you cain't shoot, would you mind goin' into one of them trances and tellin' us how you *think* you can shoot?"

Ike gazed at Indigo long and earnestly. This was the man who had rudely suggested to Brady that it "was his turn." Still, at closer range, this new arrival looked exceedingly purposeful. Ike noted that Pete's gun was hung low and handy, and that the butt shone from much use. "Shoot!" exclaimed Ike disgustedly. "Why, say, hombre, I kin shoot the eyewinkers off a horn toad and not wake him up. I kin cut the buttons offen your shirt and not burn the cloth. Many's the time I writ my name with a gun on the nigh side of a box of crackers, without so much as creasin' the sign tellin' what they was."

"How'd you spell it?" queried Pete, shifting his weight.

Ike bristled. "Lemme your gun and I'll show you."

About then several citizens bethought them of home ties which needed tightening, and departed. The saloon was all but empty. The slumbrous citizen still snored in his chair. Brady stood back of the bar, surreptitiously fingering the buckskin sack; and Pete, suave and narrow-eyed, leaned on his elbow as though studying some new and interesting species of insect.

"Nope," said Pete tersely. "I ain't lendin' no gun. I'm scared bad enough right now. I'm so dam' scared I reckon you better git out and give me room to shake. When I hear a wolf like you howl, I jest nacherally set to shakin' so bad that it's like to set all the ca'tridges in my gun off to onct. Now, don't you go to pull, for your gun's empty, same as your head. Stand right still on your laigs and don't go to scratchin' fleas like you had slipped your collar and was runnin' wild. I been readin' your map quite a spell, and the print says to me that the capital of your State is Bluff. You're worse'n a tenderfoot, for you *kin* shoot; but you ain't got sand enough in your crop to stick up a one-armed Sunday-school teacher sick in bed. You're holler from your boots up—what ain't full of whisky. They ain't enough insides to you to get drunk. You're the 'riginal storybook bad man from Stringtown, so dog-gone mean you hate yourself, and so dog-gone scared of yourself you dassen't to eat meat, fearin' you're like to bite your own paws.

"I figure that when you button your shirt you lock your trunk, judgin' from the clothes you wear. And I don't aim to say where you stole the hoss you ride. Speakin' personal, you're that kind of a thief that is so crooked he steals from hisself to keep in practice. If I had a face like you hide behind, it would hurt so I'd jest nacherally holler till somebody come along and put me out of my misery. I reckon your hoss is blind on his nigh side, or he'd 'a' gone loco afore you ever forked him. You'll never need buryin', 'cause a self-respectin' coyote would get seasick lookin' at your mug.

"I ain't talked so much since I learned how, which was some spell back. But I'm tellin' you that you broke wrong when you busted into this here town thinkin' you could git out ag'in without

sheddin' your shirt. You stuck up this here peace-lovin' community and run the barkeep ragged waitin' on you. You aimed to be the only pizen lizard on the sand and to pay your drink tally with the big noise. Lemme tell you, kind and polite, that you're listenin' to me—Indigo Pete—and if you got anything to say, jest load up that shootin' iron of yourn and talk up. I'm passin' up your little ole joke of shootin' the glass off the bar and sp'ilin' my drink of liquor, and I'm passin' up your stickin' Brady, here, for some new scenery and bottled goods; but I ain't passin' up your engagin' remark that I fork my cayuse and fan it. Such ain't my style."

Horrible Ike frowned sternly. "You mean it?" he queried.

Indigo looked extremely impatient. "Did you think I was talkin' jest to make a noise, like you? Load that artillery of yourn—for I ain't goin' to shoot you down without givin' you a chanct. Move quick, for I'm right sleepy." And Pete yawned.

Horrible Ike pulled his belt round and loaded his gun, watched meanwhile by Brady and Pete. "And now you kin drop it in your holster. When you break with me you break even. Are you set?"

Horrible Ike nodded. Brady opened his mouth to expostulate, and kept it open. At Pete's word, Horrible Ike's gun whipped up and covered Brady, who turned with hands up to confront Pete's gun within a foot of his nose.

"Shell out," said Pete softly. "You kin let down your hands, but if you got any idea of gettin' to that shotgun, forget it. Pass over that leetle sack first—and then what you got in the till. We're in some hurry."

"He's froze," said Horrible Ike, stepping round the end of the bar and exploring the cash drawer.

Just then the slumbering citizen awoke and gazed round stupidly. "Anybody buyin' a drink?" he murmured.

Indigo Pete grinned. Horrible Ike, stuffing bills and silver in his pockets, backed from behind the bar, while Pete entertained Brady. But the thing had been too easy for Pete. Nothing dramatic had occurred to quench his romantic thirst. "Give him the dust," he said, nodding to Ike. Ike drew the buckskin sack from his pocket and tossed it on the bar. "I reckon you need it," he told Brady. And together, backing away from the scene of their depredations, Pete and Horrible Ike slipped through the doorway and Brady heard the clatter of hoofs as they swept away.

Brady reached for the sack and untied it with trembling fingers. Tilting it, he poured its contents on the bar—a dull heap of wet sand.

With a loud oath, he reached for his shotgun and ran to the street. Malachite was startled by two thundering reports, but turned over in its bed and went to sleep again.

Out in the open, many long miles from Malachite, two riders drifted through the darkness. All night they rode, and dawn discovered them far up in the foothills of the Gila Range.

Pete drank his coffee and wiped his black mustache. Horrible Ike gazed into the little fire, evidently deep in thought. Presently he turned to Pete. "Just say that all over ag'in, Pete—what you said about my looks, over to Malachite. I plumb forgot some of it."

"Nope," said Pete, with that determination which had made him a success in his line. "You was sure riled—but your gun ain't empty this mornin'."

W. B. M. Ferguson in the next number of POPULAR tells a strange story—**"THE GHOST HUNTER"**
—a detective novel with a novel detective

The Buttons of Bo Bing

By J. Frank Davis

Author of "Garland—Ranger," "Arrows of Circumstance," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

They were four, and of copper, and were lacquered by an ancient Chinese artificer, whose secret perished with him, in the time of the first emperor of the Ming dynasty. Lee Carruth, son of a wealthy globe-trotter, wears the buttons at a dance at Forest Gardens Inn, Long Island, on the eve of the 1917 tennis tournament, although he knows that their tremendous value is sure to excite the avarice of not a few beholders. Bayard Williams, millionaire traveler, big-game hunter, and collector, and his secretary, Camblin, discuss the audacity of Carruth in wearing the buttons. It develops that Wong Chow, a Chinese of wealth and taste, is in town, and Williams, who specializes in Asian jewelry and ornaments, thinks that Wong is after the buttons, for which he himself is willing to pay fifty thousand dollars, and for which he has offered a lesser amount. Among the guests are Doctor Perry Eaton and Endicott Worth, a man of wealth and culture, who has a penchant for solving various kinds of problems. As they leave the dance hall for a walk before retiring, a man runs toward Doctor Eaton, and tells him that Carruth has been found lifeless under a hedge, and the indications are that he has been murdered. The buttons have been cut from his vest. Alton Parke, a rival tennis player, is kept under surveillance in his hotel room. Carruth had left the dance early and escorted to her home Grace Hartley, and Parke, who has been much interested in the girl, went away from the inn about that time to call at the Hartley home, but returned with a bruised face, saying he had been assaulted. A piece of fishing line, similar to that with which Carruth seems to have been strangled, is found in his pocket. He admits ordering an automobile for a quick trip to New York. Grace Hartley tells what she knows of the case to Worth, an old friend of her father.

(*A Three-Part Story—Part Two*)

CHAPTER VII.

MR. WORTH MAKES A PROMISE.

THE possible bearing of this on several angles of the night's events needed no further explanation. Worth nodded his understanding of the point, mentally comparing this revelation of a predatory boy's love-making with the form that Parke's reticence had taken under Chaffee's cross-examination. He said gravely, after a minute:

"Such an idea wouldn't be at all inconsistent with what he said and how he said it. And you tried to get him by phone, you say?"

"Yes, but I couldn't, and I guess it is better that I couldn't," said Miss Hartley. "Somebody would have been listening. But you can tell him."

"Whatever you wish. Do you mean you would like me to repeat what you have told me?"

"Goodness, no! Not unless he *saw* it. I don't want you to let him think I am taking too much interest, either. You see, he hasn't—he didn't say in that letter what it was he was going to tell me or ask me when he came to-night. I could not take it for granted——"

"Perhaps you merely want me to extend your sympathy in a distant sort of way and observe results."

"Yes; that's it. But not *too* distant."

"It occurs to me, Miss Hartley," Worth smiled whimsically, "that you have set me a rather complicated task. However, I shall carry out your instructions as best I can, and whichever way I do it, being a clumsy old person who has not had much experience in matters of this sort, I shall probably bungle it thoroughly."

"But you will do more than that,"

she cried. "You must find out who did kill him."

"The police are at work on that."

"That old, bald-headed Mr. Chaffee! What could he ever learn that somebody didn't tell him? If you don't find out who did it, as likely as not they'll make Alton all kinds of trouble, and when he gets out of it—he will, of course; I'm not doubting that—there still will be people who will say he must have had something to do with it or he wouldn't have been arrested."

"There always are," Worth agreed. "It is the way of the world. I'm afraid I cannot do much to help you. I have no connection with police departments, you know."

"But you have a talent for such things. Doctor Ade said so. And if you would just give a little time to it—— *Please*, Mr. Worth."

How could he refuse even an unreasonable request? It might mean hard work in vacation week. It might mean missing many or most of the tennis matches. It might—— Yet her father's daughter was banking on Franklin Hartley's assurance that he was a good sport. He sighed and surrendered.

"Very well," he promised. "I will do all I can."

She hesitated, confused. "I don't think you would like me to say anything about expenses," she suggested. "No, I'm sure you wouldn't."

"So you wisely do not mention them," he agreed. "Now, there are two or three things I want to ask you, and then I will go home and try to think it all over a little. In the first place, had Carruth ever mentioned to you any enemies or any threats or anything of that sort?"

"Never. Although I doubt if he would; he was not the sort that talks over serious matters with girls. I think he—well, perhaps he thought we were not up to understanding such things."

"He didn't mention any one following him to Forest Gardens on the train to-night?"

"No."

"Did he say where he intended going from here?"

"He said he should go right home, to Mr. Grafton's house. He did not care to go back to the dance, he said."

"Because you wouldn't be there, I suppose."

She nodded.

"He wore some unusual waistcoat buttons this evening. Did he happen to mention them to you?"

"I mentioned them to him. I commented on how odd they were, and he told me about them."

"What?"

"That they were very ancient Chinese buttons his father had picked up. He said he fancied them for waistcoat buttons, although his father had always kept them in a vault with his most valuable possessions. But what was the use, he said, of having unusual things and keeping them where nobody could see them, so he got them out of the vault to-day. Let's see. He said something about them. Oh, yes! It was that collectors bothered the life out of him to try to get him to sell them. Mr. Williams, he said—Mr. Williams is at the inn this summer, you know—had offered a large amount for them only a few days ago. And—and he said some Chinaman called at Mr. Grafton's house only to-night, before he came out from New York—some big collector—and, although he didn't see the Chinaman, he supposed that was what he wanted, too."

"Did he mention the name of this Chinese collector?"

"Yes, but I don't remember it. The name sounded meaningless, like the names of laundries, you know. I think the collector is an old man, if that would help any; at least I know he spoke of him as 'old So-and-so,' whatever the name was."

"That is all I can think of to ask to-night," Worth said, rising. "Now I would advise you to go to bed at once and get some beauty sleep, although I have to admit you do not look as though you especially needed it. Still, you have been crying, and you can't deny it."

"And I'll probably cry some more after I get back to bed," she declared defiantly. "But I shan't cry as much as I should have if you hadn't come." She gave him her hand. "Mamma knows you are here, of course, although she doesn't know all I have said. I didn't tell her about—what happened at the door. If there is any news for us, please telephone or come. Or I can see you at the hotel daytimes. You might—you might tell Alton I tried to telephone him."

Tears were very close to her eyes now. "You don't know how much I appreciate this; it almost seems," she said, trying to smile, "as though I had a father again." Then the tears overflowed, and she closed the door behind him without another word.

"I never thought I should enjoy so much talk on the part of a grown girl about my being fatherly," Worth soliloquized, as he made his way briskly in the direction of the hotel. "One could think, to hear her, I was getting positively aged." He smiled to himself philosophically. "Well, forty-six *is* aged—to twenty-two."

Entering the hotel as he had left it, he hesitated a bare second at his own floor, then continued on up another flight of stairs. He had rather expected to find a sleuth-mannered constable sitting in the corridor that led to Room 316; the emptiness of the hallway might mean that the hotel management had objected or that Chaffee, not really expecting Parke to attempt escape, had contented himself with placing a guard where the exits could be watched.

A light shone through the transom of Parke's room. Worth tapped on his door lightly, with due consideration for the rest of other occupants of the corridor. "Yes," Parke called fretfully. "What is it?"

"Mr. Worth, may I see you a moment, please?"

Parke opened the door promptly. He was in bath robe and slippers, and a tumbled bed gave evidence that he had tried to sleep and given it up. "Come in," he said dubiously. "What is it now?"

Worth crossed to an easy-chair. "May I sit down?" he said. "It is getting pretty late, and I am not as young as I used to be. I have been reminded of it lately—several times."

Parke eyed him without reply suspiciously. "Where is your friend, the chief of police?"

"No, you're wrong," Worth assured him. "I haven't seen him since a few moments after we left this room. I am not here on any errand having to do with him. When you asked me for advice I couldn't give it because I was here solely by his request. Now, however——"

He looked the boy in the eye reassuringly. "I have just come from a little call on Miss Hartley," he said. "Miss Hartley heard about——"

"Let's not discuss any lady at all," Parke cried. "Miss Hartley cannot have anything to do with this difficulty of mine."

"On the contrary," Worth reminded him mildly, "if it were not for Miss Hartley I am quite sure you would have told the truth about where your fight took place—and that would have lessened your difficulty very greatly. She feels greatly disturbed."

"Naturally. She was—she was going to marry him, I suppose."

"I don't see why you should suppose any such thing. Merely because he happened to escort her home from the dance——"

The expression that flitted across Parke's face was illuminative.

"I see," murmured Worth. "Miss Hartley was right. You *were* across the street."

The boy took a step toward Worth, startled. "What do you mean?" he demanded. "Across the street from where? Didn't you hear me say I hadn't seen Lee Carruth to-night?"

"Did I mention Lee Carruth?"

Parke bit his lips, started to say something, then walked nervously across the floor and back.

"Sit down, please, and listen to me." The older man's tone was authorita-

tive, but friendly, and, after a moment's hesitation, Parke obeyed. "Understand, please, that I am not here as a representative of Mr. Chaffee or of the police in any capacity. I am here because Miss Hartley asked me to come here; Miss Hartley's father and I were friends a good many years ago."

"She asked you to come? Why?"

"Before I tell you will you answer me one question honestly? I give you my word I shall regard what you say as confidential. Will you tell me whether you saw something during your walk—up past the tennis courts—that made you think perhaps Miss Hartley held young Carruth in unusual regard?"

Parke considered this with puzzled brows. He seemed to want to answer honestly, and yet to be restrained by caution.

"Suppose——" he said finally. "Suppose I were to say that I had an impression of the sort, due merely to having got the idea that Carruth had gone home with her?"

"Well, I suppose I can't blame you for being cautious. In that case, I should consider myself authorized to tell you that you had made a mistake; that there was no relationship except ordinary friendship between him and Miss Hartley."

"But I saw him——" The admission was out of his mouth before he could prevent it. He flushed and looked miserable.

"Don't be alarmed. I was speaking the truth when I said I should regard what you said as confidential. In fact, I almost always speak the truth; it's a paying habit." Worth spoke lightly, hoping to put the lad more at his ease. "You saw him—er—standing in the doorway at her house, I gather."

Parke was silent.

"Would it interest you to know that the incident you saw was due to a—er—sudden emotion on Carruth's part; that Miss Hartley was an unwilling participant; that she thereupon told him he had forgotten himself and closed the door in his face?"

"She did?"

"It *would* interest you evidently. Yes, you seem to have been a spectator of the one incident in the whole scene that could have been interpreted in a way different from the truth. And you seem to have been influenced by it to say things that have landed you in a good deal of trouble—— That is why you decided to return to New York so suddenly, I suppose."

"See here, Mr. Worth," Parke blurted. "If you are trying to trap me—and it doesn't seem possible you are, after what you've said—I've got to be trapped. I seem to be in an awful mess, and I've got to have somebody to advise me. I never saw you before to-night in my life, but of course I've heard of you—as one of the old-timers—and——"

Worth interrupted him to say dryly: "Nearly everybody I meet to-night seems to place me as an old-timer."

"I don't believe you would fool me," Parke went on impulsively, "and if there is a chance you would, it's a chance I've just got to take."

"Suppose we eliminate the chances," Worth replied. "You probably never heard it, because I don't practice, but I am an attorney in good standing. You are familiar with legal ethics, I suppose."

"More or less."

"Go over to your clothes there and get a one-dollar bill. Give it to me as a legal retainer. After that, if I were to abuse your confidence, you would have recourse through the Bar Association."

Parke rose to obey, then hesitated and faced his visitor. "Excuse me for doubting you, Mr. Worth. The retainer isn't necessary—unless you really would be willing to take a substantial one."

"Thank you, no." Worth smiled. "There is no need for going into details, but Miss Hartley's father paid me my fee—a long time ago. So I promised her I would do what I could to help you out."

"She asked you to? Tell me what she said."

"I can't exactly. The idea seemed

to be that she was afraid you were foolish and rattle-brained. Not that she expressed herself that way"—as Parke's face clouded—"but that was the substance of it as I translated it—in my middle-aged, fatherly way. I might say that she had expected to see you this evening, and had to leave the dance early because her mother was ill, and that when she finally went to bed—to be wakened by a well-meaning fool friend of the family who was bursting with the news that you seemed to be mixed into the difficulty—she was disappointed that you had not come."

"But of course, Mr. Worth, when I saw——"

"That is what she feared. When you saw—what you saw—what did you do?"

"I turned and headed back for the hotel as fast as I could walk. I wasn't thinking of much of anything—that is to say, clearly. I suppose that is why, when that Boche jumped out at me from behind a big tree, he got me off my guard. Say, Mr. Worth, what else did she say?"

"Very little—and she can say it over again herself after we get you out of your troubles. She tried to telephone you, but they said the room didn't answer."

"I told them to do that; I didn't want to be bothered. Lord! If I had had the slightest idea she would call, I—— Say, Mr. Worth, I haven't seen her for nearly two years. How does she look?"

"No, indeed," Worth asserted positively. "I respectfully decline. Personally, I think she looks very nice and attractive, but if I were to tell you so, you would be indignant with me for my inadequacy. And the thing to do now is not to discuss beautiful young ladies, or even the most beautiful of young ladies, but what we are going to do to get you out of hot water."

"Why, that's easy enough now," Parke cried, with boyish optimism. "Of course, at first I refused to tell about my fight because I wanted to get away; now I don't care how long I stay. Then I stuck to the story when I knew it was Lee Carruth that had been killed because I didn't want to drag her name into a case like that. But now——"

He spread his hands airily, and left the sentence unfinished. His manner evidenced a light-hearted assurance that his troubles were quite over.

Worth shook his head gravely. "I'm afraid it isn't quite so easy as that," he warned. "You see, if you correct your statements now, they are going to ask you why you did not tell the truth in the first place. And if you explain truthfully——"

Parke grew suddenly serious.

"That would still bring her name into it, wouldn't it?" he said. "And I can see those old hens down on the piazzas, gossiping over their knitting that they guess he wouldn't have done it if she—— No, that won't do."

"I'm afraid you have not grasped the most important thing. Suppose people—Mr. Chaffee, for instance—were to know about this happening in the doorway, might they not argue that you preceded Carruth to Lafayette Avenue to the place where his body was found, and lay in wait for him? You see, you can hardly tell the whole truth even now."

"But I wasn't on Lafayette Avenue."

"True, but you cannot prove that. On the contrary, the fact that you said the fight was on Jenney Street—where there are no trees—discounts any other story you may tell."

"I seem to have made a deuce of a mess of it," Parke said, after a moment, during which the significance of his situation sank into his consciousness. "What can I do?"

"My advice is—nothing. I cannot see how anything you can say will help you. I advise that you say nothing. Literally nothing. If Chaffee asks you any more questions, tell him you decline to answer by advice of counsel. If he arrests you, get word to me. I don't think he will arrest you if you remain quietly here in your room; he isn't any too sure of his suspicions, to say nothing of his evidence. Meantime, he may find the murderer; then nobody will bother to ask you questions or concern themselves about where you were

at the time of the crime. If he doesn't ——" Worth sighed. "Then it is up to me to try to do it."

"One question," Parke said as Worth slowly rose and made ready to go to his own room. "Nobody has told me yet how Carruth was killed."

"He was strangled with a cord." Worth informed him gravely. "A cord so nearly like that bluefish line of yours that without putting them side by side at least the eye cannot tell the difference."

The boy's face grew heavy as he realized how ominous this fact might prove. "I've heard about circumstantial evidence," he said slowly, "but I never realized how—how it could accumulate like this. Why, if I were on a jury and that story about what I saw in the doorway were told and that cord that you say the murderer used happened to match my fishline, I'd find the man guilty; I know it."

Worth turned at the door to speak a few cheerful words and advise the boy to try to go to sleep. Parke interrupted him, not seeming to have heard a thing he said.

"Say!" he demanded explosively. "She—Grace—didn't think there was a chance I did it, did she? Whatever the evidence might seem to be, she didn't believe it?"

"Her own words, when I told her it had been a premeditated attack, were that it was impossible for you to be concerned in it."

"Great!" He was almost restored to good spirits. "She's all right, what? Say, how did she look to you to-night? I hope I'll see her to-morrow, but perhaps I can't. Tell me, how did she seem?"

Worth considered this. "Like a daughter," he said grimly, and departed.

CHAPTER VIII.

"A GIFT FROM THE GREAT GODS."

At exactly ten o'clock on Sunday mornings the dining room of the Forest Gardens Inn was closed and locked, and thereafter neither persuasion nor pelf nor pull could win a breakfast. With this in mind as a recollection from other years, Endicott Worth passed hurriedly through the outer portals at nine-fifty-eight. He overcame the reproach in his waiter's manner with appropriate largess, and consumed eggs, toast, and coffee in leisure.

The newspapers that the waiter brought him had brief and inadequate reports of the night's happenings; it had been too late when the New York police got around to tipping the newspapers for them to send special men to Forest Gardens, and they had been forced to depend upon Chief Chaffee's report, as interpreted by the detective department of the metropolis. This interpretation did not do entire justice to Chief Chaffee; one would have gathered from the brief story that the matter of locating the murderer—which, it appeared, was already progressing most satisfactorily—was entirely in the hands of the New York police department, especially one Detective Sergeant Geraghty. Mr. Worth had no hesitation in deciding that Mr. Geraghty himself had been so good as to furnish such details as appeared in the papers. He also fancied Chief Chaffee would not be exactly enthusiastic over the small credit his efforts received at the hands of the city press.

Two striking omissions were common to all the reports, presumably intentional and due to Mr. Geraghty's opinion that his efforts would be served by the suppression. There was reference to the blow on the temple from a slung shot, but none whatever to the real cause of death; the knotted cord was nowhere even hinted at. Neither did the reports mention the ruddy waistcoat buttons.

Upon leaving the dining room, Worth walked slowly through the lobby and out upon the piazza, where were many people, most of them immersed in the manifold sections of Sunday newspapers. Some were gossiping idly. Automobiles were coming to rest at the entrance, filling with passengers and departing. A few soberly dressed individuals were quite obviously headed

for church. More had bags of golf clubs.

Worth came upon Doctor Eaton sitting alone in a comfortable corner. "Good morning," the surgeon said. "Have you changed your habits? I thought you were a moderately early riser, even on the Sabbath day."

"Things happened after you went to bed last night," Worth confided, moving an armful of supplements to the floor and sitting down in the chair that had held them. "The long arm of a well-ordered past reached out and hurled me into the center of this Carruth case. I am sorry to say that there is danger of my becoming a detective—unless the chief of police hurries."

Doctor Eaton saw there was serious meaning behind Worth's light words. "I thought you went right to your room," he said.

"I did. I went right to my room, and turned around and came right out again. I had hardly started to undress when the telephone rang——"

In as few words as possible he told Doctor Eaton most of the things that had happened following that telephone call. He touched lightly on some of the details of his interview with Miss Hartley. He did not feel at liberty to repeat her disclosure regarding Carruth's cave-man tactics; he ignored the girl's reference to the story her father had told her of his "sporting blood," merely saying that she had heard of his slight experience in crime analysis and remembered him as a friend of her father's. If Doctor Eaton's knowledge of men and things led him to believe Worth was not telling him everything that had occurred, he appreciated that there were probably good reasons for the reticence, and did not allow himself to show it.

"Have you seen Chaffee this morning?" Worth asked, when he had come to the end of his explanation.

"No."

"Then naturally you don't know whether or not he has secured an exact description of those buttons?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. As that is one of the first things he ought to do, and as he seems to be a fair-to-average country policeman, he probably has not."

Worth drummed a moment on the arm of his chair thoughtfully. "This may be the simplest kind of a murder for robbery," he said slowly, "but there are features about it that do not look so. Collectors have been trying to buy the buttons. A Chinese was in Forest Gardens early last evening, looking for Carruth. Strangulation by the bowstring is not a common Western form of murder; there is something essentially Oriental about it. And—did you examine those knots?"

"Not carefully."

"I know a little about knots; that is to say, such knots as sailors use. I do not recall ever having seen knots exactly like those in that cord. It may be a simple case of a thug robbing a rich boy who was foolish enough to wear five or ten thousand dollars' worth of jewelry on a dark street; I do not ignore the simple solution of a problem merely to seek difficult ones. But on the other hand——"

He hesitated a moment to arrange his words, or perhaps his order of thought, to his satisfaction. "It took me a long time to get to sleep, late as it was, this morning, and the more I thought the case over the more convinced I became that the whole business hinges primarily upon those buttons. Now, if they happened to be of gold or were diamond-studded or otherwise were of easily recognized value, that wouldn't help us much, because the robbery, under such circumstances, might have been committed by almost any kind of a criminal, and he might have acted either with premeditation or on the spur of the moment. But they are peculiar—perhaps unique—and their peculiarity gives the case a certain peculiarity.

"In the first place, it seems to me important that the buttons do not *look* valuable at all, and that ordinary thieves of the slung-shot school do not know much about works of art. There are several thousand crooks in New York who wouldn't hesitate to kill any

man for his watch or his bank roll or his diamonds, if they thought they could get away with it, but those freaky and red waistcoat buttons are hardly ordinary bait. But this murderer did know their value, because he took them.

"A thief of the lower grade might learn somewhere the great value of such buttons, but his very knowledge of why they were valuable would tend to make him leave them alone, because he would appreciate how difficult it would be to dispose of them, and no professional thief keeps the identifiable proceeds of his stealings about him a moment longer than he has to. They couldn't be sold through any ordinary channel, you know. Only millionaire collectors would be in the market for them, and only such of those as would be willing to purchase, knowing perfectly well that they were buying stolen goods—which eliminates even the dishonest, whose reason for collecting is solely to exhibit and brag about their spoils. Do you see? The thief couldn't find anybody short of an international fence who would dare touch them, and international fences do not deal with small fry."

Doctor Eaton nodded appreciation of this reasoning.

"Then the murderer knew their value and yet took them, hence he is not an ordinary thief, and this is not a simple crime," he said. "Where does the theory lead next?"

"I haven't gone beyond that," Worth confessed. "I never dare let a theory regarding a crime lead me too far in advance of proven facts."

"I take it for granted you are quite convinced young Parke had nothing to do with it. What about that missing bit of fishline?"

"Because that fishline looked to be about the same size as the cord the murderer used, it would not follow that it was of the same texture and quality. When Chaffee has a chance to compare them we shall probably learn that there is no real similarity between them. But, even if there were, it would be, in my opinion, nothing more than a remarkable coincidence. No. Alton Parke is not a murderer. He told me the truth in his room this morning. I would stake anything on it."

Doctor Eaton nodded. "He seems like a pretty decent kid," he agreed.

"Do you know Bayard Williams?" Worth asked.

"Not well. But I don't know that anybody knows him well; he is a distant and reserved person. I have a passing-the-time-of-day acquaintance with him."

"Is he about this morning?"

"He was when I came out. I noticed him and his secretary on the piazza on the other side."

"Would you mind taking me around there and introducing me, if he is still there? I met him once, long ago, but he wouldn't remember me. I want to ask him about the buttons."

The surgeon acquiesced promptly, and they entered the nearest door, crossed the ballroom, now deserted except for a few newspaper readers near the windows who had been unable to find seats to their liking outside and came out upon the opposite piazza. The Asian collector and his right-hand man sat in comfortable chairs, immersed in news sheets. They looked up as Doctor Eaton and his companion stopped in front of them. Williams bowed.

"Mr. Williams," Doctor Eaton said, "I would like to present my very old friend, Mr. Endicott Worth."

"We met once, at a dinner at the Harvard Club," Worth said pleasantly. "It was the night you were one of the guests; you had just returned from a trip into the Gobi Desert. You wouldn't remember me, of course; you met so many new people that evening."

Williams, who had risen, shook hands with Worth courteously, although not cordially. "I remember; glad to meet you again," he said, speaking the falsehood that politeness seems to require under such circumstances. "Mr. Camblin; Doctor Eaton, Mr. Worth," he added with a careless gesture of introduction.

"Mr. Worth and I were inadvertently drawn a bit into this case of

young Carruth last night," Doctor Eaton said. "Doctor Ade called on me for assistance, although no assistance was possible, of course, and Mr. Worth was with me. Have you a few moments to spare? Mr. Worth wants to ask you something that perhaps you can answer. Something about those buttons Carruth was wearing."

Williams sat back in his chair, his heavy-lidded eyes on Doctor Eaton's face and his features immobile and expressionless as always. "What about them?" he queried. "And why?"

"Curiosity purely," Worth said. "I noticed them when Carruth crossed the floor last night. I have seen gold buttons and gem-studded buttons worn with evening clothes, but I do not recall ever having seen reddish ones. Mr. Grafton told us, after the murder, that they were quite valuable. He also thought you, as a collector, might know something about them."

"Won't you sit down?" said Williams. "Camblin, give your chair to Mr. Worth, and see if you can't find a couple more for Doctor Eaton and yourself."

As Camblin hurried away, Williams sat for a moment, his eyes traveling slowly from one to the other. "Yes," he said slowly. "I can tell you something about them. Any collector could. They are among the most famous Asian ornaments in the world; perhaps it wouldn't be going too far to say they are the most famous. At least, their worth is immeasurably greater than any other object of art that has no great intrinsic value."

"What is their intrinsic value?" Doctor Eaton asked.

Camblin dragged up two chairs, and Williams waited until he and Doctor Eaton were seated before replying:

"Not fifty dollars surely. They are of copper, peculiarly lacquered. Of rough copper, bearing on the face a crude red dragon on a black ground. Not beautiful. Not artistic, as we understand the word to-day. But remarkable. Remarkable, indeed. Because there isn't another piece of work like them in existence. The art of treating copper in just that way was discovered by the man who made them—and died with him. And they are old. They were made during the final years of the reign of Hungwu, and Hungwu became a guest on high in 1399."

"A guest on high?" Doctor Eaton repeated the phrase.

"The old Chinese phrase to describe the death of a personage," Williams explained. "Until quite recently—at the time of the Boxer troubles, to be exact—the Buttons of Bo Bing remained either in the Hanlin College or an inner temple of the Forbidden City for more than five hundred years."

Bayard Williams' enthusiasm as a collector almost gave warmth to his voice, although his face remained expressionless. Worth, eying him appraisingly, doubted if the most violent emotion would ever show in his countenance. It was a face of mahogany, with features as stony as an ancient joss.

"Were they made by a Chinese named Bo Bing?" he asked.

"Nobody knows who made them. Tradition says it was a smith in the mountains near the headwaters of the Sang-koi. The story runs that a general of Hungwu, when he drove the Mongols out of Yunnan province, heard of them and put the smith to death in order that there should never again be any like them. It is also said that old Hungwu, when he heard it, put him to death also for having killed an art stillborn. Bo Bing may have been the general's name, although more likely it was some name of which this is a corruption, because 'Bo' is not a family name of that period."

Williams paused a minute, as though recalling facts long stowed away in his memory; then went on:

"This is more or less traditional, you see, because nothing that was written about them for the next hundred years or so seems to be in existence. Europe first heard of the buttons in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, when they were referred to in a letter from a Portuguese gentleman who was in China with D'Andrade. He called them

the Buttons of Bo Bing, and mentioned that he had talked with a man who had seen them in the Hanlin College. Well, they remained in the Hanlin College, at Peking, for many years. Then they were taken to the Forbidden City for greater safety. They disappeared from there during the foreign occupation. They appeared a year or two later in the hands of a Levantine jeweler in Europe. Carruth bought them."

"Is it known what he paid?"

"Not exactly. Probably about fifteen thousand dollars. To a collector they are worth more. I would give——" He checked himself, and apparently finished the sentence in different form from what he had intended. "I would give a great deal to know what has become of them."

"They will probably be kept hidden by the thief and finally offered for sale in some other country, I suppose."

"If I were sure it would be a white country, I shouldn't mind so much," Williams said. "Frankly, I should bid for them. But if they ever get back to China——" His gesture implied finality.

"Chinese might not be willing to sell them, then, not even for such a great price as you collectors are willing to pay?" Worth suggested.

"Not for a hundred thousand dollars," Williams asserted positively. "It is a matter of superstition—or you can call it religion, if you prefer—with them. Perhaps religion is the word. It has to do with obeying the commands of the honorable ancestors, and that is as near to a religion as most Chinese come."

After a moment, during which neither of the others spoke, he said:

"I haven't been in China since the recent political troubles began, but I would wager anything that thousands of Chinese intellectuals believe their revolutions and even their troubles with Japan would be over if only they could replace those buttons in the Forest of Pencils. They think they have the word of their ancestors for it." To the inquiring looks of the doctor and Worth he explained, a trifle impatiently: "The Forest of Pencils, in ancient Chinese phraseology, is the Hanlin College. Let any Chinese of the upper class once get possession of them, and back in the college they will go—probably forever."

"This is very interesting," Worth exclaimed. "It is a superstition I had never heard of. Just what is the foundation for it? What merit have these buttons in the college of the Hanlin scholars that they have not in any other place?"

"It was in one of the Hsu Ting books," Williams said. "I can't remember the thing; objects of art in Asia I know something about, but the literature isn't in my line. Do you remember it, Camblin?" He made explanation to the others: "Camblin supplies the literary details of our combination. He was brought up and educated in China, and he reads their old books in the original characters."

"As I recall it," the secretary said somewhat modestly, as though he did not set himself up as an authority on anything when his employer was present, "the quotation Mr. Williams refers to is in the third book of Hsu Tinglien. He wrote them in the latter years of the Ta Ch'ing dynasty, say about 1640. Some of the Chinese regard him as a sort of prophet; at least as ranking at the top of the secondary teachers."

"Can you tell them the substance of it?" commanded Williams.

"I think perhaps I can quote it." He thought, frowning, for a second, culling his mind for the exact words. Then—— "It runs like this: 'More especially are we to reverence the ancient things, and for a reason. Consider the red buttons which came from the hills of Yunnan; they are unique in the world, a rare gift from the great gods. None were like them, and none are, and none will be. So it was a wise saying that has come from our immortal ancestors, worthy of all honor, that while the red buttons remain in the Forest of Pencils, the great gods are pleased, and there shall not come upon the land the government of which the

Master Teacher said: It is fiercer than a tiger.'"

"What kind of government was that?" Worth asked.

"I don't know to just what it refers," Camblin replied. "The Master Teacher would be Confucius; something in his writings undoubtedly."

"Are those books of Hsu—what is the name?—to be found in an English translation? I should like to see them."

"I think so."

Worth patted his pockets, and failed to find a pencil. He extended the section of newspaper he had in his hand. "Would you mind writing that name on the margin here?" he asked.

Camblin, with the celerity of great practice, went into his left-hand side pocket with one hand and produced a little note pad, and into a vest pocket with the other and got a pencil. "No need to use newspaper margins," he smiled. "A secretary is always prepared for sudden calls to make notes." He wrote the name "Hsu Tinglien," tore off the sheet, and passed it to Worth, and returned the pad and pencil to their respective pockets almost as automatically as he had produced them.

"I should say," rumbled Williams contemplatively, "that if either faction of the Chinese were able to get those buttons right now, China would become either a monarchy or a republic or something else fairly stable—and remain so. Whoever had them in his possession would certainly have tremendous power. I am not sure he wouldn't even be able to consolidate the Chinese sufficiently to resist the influence of Japan." The collector scowled slightly, as though he did not approve of his own unusual loquacity. "Have I been able to give you the information you desired?" he asked very politely.

"Indeed you have," Worth replied, taking the hint and rising. "I thank you—and you, too, Mr. Camblin. It has been very interesting; very interesting indeed."

He and Doctor Eaton murmured perfunctory phrases of departure, and turned away. Williams, as they left, was already returning to his newspaper.

Just around the first corner of the piazza, they came in view of the approach from the street to the main hotel entrance. Chief Chaffee was coming up the walk. He was hurrying and perspiring. His eyes looked as though he had not slept long or well. They sauntered to meet him.

"Just the men I was lookin' for!" he exclaimed in a lowered voice. "I went to New York early with Henry Polsey—the station agent, you know—and the police in there got me a regular expert on strings to come back with me. Him and me just went up to Doctor Ade's house, so he could compare that fishline we took away from Parke with the piece that was around Carruth's neck. And it *matches!* It ain't only *similar* string, but it's exactly the *same* string."

CHAPTER IX.

AN ALLIANCE.

Worth thought quickly, while the chief looked triumphantly from one to the other; then he said very earnestly:

"Mr. Chaffee, there is one explanation for that, I am sure, and only one. It was given us by Parke himself last night, when he told us he lost the sample of twine. The murderer found it—or, perhaps, stole it."

"'Tain't likely!" scoffed the chief.

"It doesn't seem probable, but it is more probable than a number of other things that would have to be true for Parke to be guilty. Parke did not commit that murder. I know it."

Chaffee scanned Worth's face suspiciously. "How do you know so much?" he demanded. "Who did it, then?"

"I don't know who did it, but I know Parke didn't. Consider this, please: Those knots were under the left ear; the noose was pulled taut from behind; their construction shows that. Alton Parke is right-handed; he writes right-handed, eats right-handed, plays tennis right-handed. That noose was tightened by a left-handed man."

Chaffee weighed this, his face dis-

playing incredulity that shifted to half-convinced perplexity. "Why didn't you mention all this when you were looking at the string last night?"

"I did, I think. At least, I suggested that you look into whether Parke was right or left-handed. Perhaps I didn't go into it as fully as I might have; I wasn't as much interested in the case last night as I am now."

"What do you mean by that?"

"This is hardly the place for a conference. Would you mind coming up to my room for a few minutes—you and Doctor Eaton? I'd like to talk things over. I think I can help you."

"But there ain't any time to talk," Chaffee objected. "I ought to see Parke right off; I haven't seen him since we left him together. I ought to find out what this Miss Hartley knows about where he was. I ought——"

"It happens I can tell you more or less about that. Will you come up for a few minutes?"

Reluctantly, and more because of Worth's superior forcefulness than because he saw any reason to change the program he had planned, he consented. "Well, if it don't take too long," was the form of his concession.

As soon as they were seated in his room, Worth addressed himself to the chief:

"We had one or two disagreements last evening, Mr. Chaffee. Shall we forget them? If I said anything offensive, I should be glad if you would overlook it; I am not always even-tempered."

"Why—er—that's all right," the chief said, mollified. "You did jump me a little hard about that clock and the police force, but I ain't got any hard feelin's."

"Thank you. I speak more sharply than I ought sometimes. I can explain my interest in the case quite simply. The young lady who has been mentioned—Miss Hartley—is a friend of mine; that is to say, her father was. A very good friend. So it happened, after we separated last night, that I called on her. I can assure you that Miss Hartley does not know any more than we do about last night's murder, nor as much. Also that she has not met Parke for more than a year, unless perhaps she has seen him this morning, which is improbable. Also that Carruth left her home in good health within ten or fifteen minutes after he reached it last evening, and that she had no knowledge of what happened to him until a friend telephoned her mother, after that red-headed bell boy had scattered the news about the hotel that you intended to arrest Parke. It was then, also, that she first learned Parke had arrived in Forest Gardens.

"I tell you these things for two reasons. One is my desire to keep Miss Hartley's name from becoming involved in this case, even to such a degree as it would if you merely called on her to ask a few questions; you know what such a call would mean in this gossiping community. Perhaps you have daughters yourself."

"Two. You're right; it's easy to get talked about."

"The second reason is that I am desirous of helping you to catch the real murderer—principally because I want to see Parke absolutely cleared of all suspicion."

"I thought you never met him till last night."

"I didn't. I am a friend of Miss Hartley."

"Oh-ho!" the chief exclaimed. "So *that's* the way—— But I thought probably Carruth was——"

"No. Now you may know that I do not especially need money. The thousand-dollar reward does not interest me at all, and I do not care for any part of it. If I were able to assist you in finding the right man, you could have all the reward—and the credit, too—under certain circumstances."

"Huh!" the chief grunted at the qualifying phrase. "What circumstances?"

"That you allow yourself to be guided by me to a reasonable extent in the investigation, and that you let me suggest a course of action that will make it unnecessary to arrest young Parke, and at the same time will protect

you by keeping him right here in Forest Gardens."

Chaffee considered this proposition dubiously. "He lied about where he had the fight," he said, "and it was his string."

"Notwithstanding which, he did not kill Lee Carruth. I had a talk with Alton Parke, Mr. Chaffee, in his room at one o'clock this morning. I can't tell you anything more than that, but I am entirely convinced that his reasons for not saying exactly where that fight took place are based on good personal grounds."

"Did he tell them to you?"

"He told me enough to convince me he had not even heard of Carruth's death until you mentioned it. Well?"

"What's this advice you figure on givin' me that will keep me from arrestin' him and yet won't let him run away?"

"I suggest this: That we go to Parke's room together and that he give you his word of honor that he will not leave Forest Gardens. If he does so, I am willing to indorse his paper, as it were; I will give you *my* word of honor that he doesn't attempt to escape. If you want to, you can have him followed, although I would rather you didn't, merely because a sleuth in a place this size might as well carry a sandwich sign advertising his occupation, and you can tell all your policemen to arrest him if he tries to take a train, a trolley, or an automobile. He will agree, I feel sure, to stay within a short radius of the inn—say within five or six blocks. As a matter of fact, I think he will spend most of his time in his room; it wouldn't be especially pleasant for him to have to answer questions just now. That, however, may be left to him. Meantime, if you wish, you may search him and all his belongings; he will waive a search warrant. I think you will not find Carruth's watch nor his cuff links nor his vest buttons. And I am sure, if you will trace Parke's life back from last night to the minute he was born, you will find that he never owned a slung shot."

The last three sentences had more effect on Chaffee than all that had gone before. "It don't seem likely that a rich kid like him would take those things," he admitted. "That part of it has stuck in my crop ever since his name came into it. And he hasn't been short of money or gambling or in trouble or anything like that; I've had that looked up already. But that string around Carruth's neck——"

"Was pulled tight by a left-handed man. Don't forget that. Expert evidence to that effect would set Parke free in no time, if you were to arrest him."

"But who did it?"

"A left-handed man who knew how to make very unusual knots. That is all I am actually sure of, although I have several ideas in my mind that go a little farther than that. If you want to make the agreement I have suggested, I shall give you all the help I can. I mean by that I shall take the time to do some investigating on my own part."

"I assure, you, chief," Doctor Eaton put in, speaking for the first time, "Mr. Worth is no amateur as an investigator of criminal puzzles. Perhaps you heard of the Bernstein diamond case?"

"Who didn't?"

The doctor inclined his head toward Worth. "He worked it out for the police."

Chaffee eyed Worth with added respect. "Well," he said slowly, "I don't see's I could arrest Parke yet, anyway. There ain't any motive, and the watch and so forth are missing, and quite a lot remains to be done lookin' up Petey Mack and that Dutch friend of his. By gracious!" He slapped his thigh. "I wonder if this Petey is left-handed. I'll have to telephone that to Geraghty."

"Who is Petey Mack?" Worth asked.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I'd most forgot about him, finding out how those pieces of string matched and all. Why, he was the squint-eyed man. Henry Polsey identified his picture at the rogues' gallery before he'd looked at more than twenty or thirty fellers' pictures with bad eyes. 'That's him!' he

says the very minute he saw the picture. Geraghty was out lookin' for him when I came back, and Henry he stayed up in town so's to identify him when they get him. His name is Peter McMahon, alias Petey Mack, alias 'Squinty.' Petey Mack is what he's called most. He's a tough nut, but he ain't ever been suspected of murder before. He ain't ever been a gunman, so far as his record shows, but he's rolled drunks and stuck up fellers that were flashin' too much money once or twice. That cough that Foster noticed is as much a trade-mark with him as his eyes. He's kinda consumptive, I guess, and off and on, besides that, he hits some kind of dope."

"Opium?"

"Either that or this here stuff they call 'snow.' Geraghty says he used to hang out in Chinatown a good deal, but lately he ain't been seen around there. Geraghty thought maybe he was one of the fellers that has been cured by the Harrison law cuttin' off their supply."

"What has he been doing lately?"

"Well, the detectives didn't know exactly, except that he's been seen with some of these fellers that are pullin' trouble for the gov'ment because they hate England so. What is it they call 'em? Sinn Fein, ain't it?"

"It looks as though you and Geraghty were on a fairly warm trail," Worth commented. "Did you know Carruth helped break up a pro-German soap-box meeting on Thirty-seventh Street Friday night?"

"Thunder, no! Did he?"

"It was in yesterday morning's papers. This companion of his—the one who attacked Parke because he mistook him for Carruth—was a German. Perhaps that isn't significant, but it could be. By the way, did you get any line on the German?"

"His face wasn't in the gallery, or, if it was, Henry couldn't find it."

Worth thought a moment. "I should think the place to get the next information we need would be the department of justice," he said. "They don't tell much, even to the police. Do you know any official of the department—intimately?"

"Not intimately or any other way," the chief confessed. "I ain't ever met a secret-service man in my life that I know of."

"I do. I'm going to town by and by, and I'll try to see him. Perhaps he'll be able and willing to help us out. There are some other matters I want to ask about in New York—matters that have no bearing if this McMahon really did it, but otherwise might prove important. In the meantime, as regards Parke——"

"I guess I might as well accept your proposition," the chief agreed, although his manner was still dubious. "It won't be bad to have a little help. I don't figure anybody could run the policin' of this town any better'n I do ordinary times, but this is some out of the usual—and this Geraghty, he's a pretty good man, I guess, but I know who'll get all the credit if him and me do it. I'll admit it don't seem like good police work to let Parke go running round loose when that string matches like it does, but, as you say, I can prob'ly get him again if he tries to make a getaway."

"He won't," Worth promised. "Then suppose we go up and call on him now. I have one or two little things to do before I go to town, besides getting lunch. There's a Sunday train at one-three, isn't there?"

Ten minutes after this, Alton Parke had become a willing, not to say enthusiastic, party to the agreement. He no longer showed the slightest desire to leave the cool of Forest Gardens for the heat and dust of New York; in fact, he declared that while he probably should have luncheon and dinner in his room to avoid being the target of curious eyes and questions he expected to go out in the evening to make a call. He mentioned this, he said, so the chief would not be worried if he saw him leaving the inn by an inconspicuous door after dark.

"In which direction?" Chaffee asked.

"Oh, over through Jenney Street, I expect."

"All right." The chief allowed himself a knowing smile as he added: "Over through Jenney Street, where there ain't any trees."

The boy ignored the thrust. "Now if you want to search my bags——" he said, and moved to throw them open.

"No," said Chaffee slowly. "I ain't goin' to." He looked about at his companions sheepishly. "I might as well admit something," he said, "seein' as it would certainly come out if you ever got arrested and brought to trial, and otherwise we ain't any of us likely to mention it. If I had thought of searchin' those bags last night, I'd 'a' done it. But I never thought of it until I'd been in bed an hour, and you'd had half the night to get whatever you wanted to out of the way. Maybe you did. Maybe you slipped the stuff to Mr. Worth here when he called at one o'clock."

This reference to Worth was manifestly intended for persiflage, for the chief laughed heartily, and it evidenced to all three that he had undergone a distinct change of heart and now regarded them—Worth and Eaton at least—as fellow workers, entitled to enjoy such little professional jokes as this, even when they were on himself. He moved to go then, and Worth and the doctor also rose.

"A minute, while you have that suit case open," Worth said to Parke. "That is the case that has the bluefish line in it, isn't it? Let me have a little piece of it, will you? About two feet, or two feet and a half."

"What do you want of it? You ain't questionin' what this expert——" Chaffee began, but Worth interrupted him:

"Not at all. I want to study that cord in Doctor Ade's possession, and then make a few experiments with knots."

He coiled the bit of cord that Parke gave him and slipped it into his pocket. The visitors left the room. Chaffee was the last, and after the others were through the door he turned to Parke.

"When you go out to make that call to-night," he whispered ponderously, "don't get into any fights. But, if you do, pick a street with trees on it."

Clearly, Chief of Police Chaffee was not a man to allow a clever quip to languish from disuse.

CHAPTER X.

SHADOWS OF ASIA.

Mrs. John G. Pellinger teetered and tottered toward Worth and Doctor Eaton where they stood on the piazza near the main entrance watching Chief Chaffee get into his little automobile. Mrs. Pellinger was conceded by all the porch habitués at the inn to be their champion nonstop conversationalist. A woman of wealth was Mrs. Pellinger; of wealth plus a reputation. This reputation was that in a certain period vaguely referred to as "when I was younger," she had been esteemed by somebody or other whose judgment counted to have been the most beautiful débutante in Philadelphia. One gathered this must have been some time ago.

Mrs. Pellinger invariably attracted attention from newcomers at the inn. Observing this, she attributed it to her looks. She was right. By carefully endeavoring to look twenty years younger than she was, she intangibly succeeded in giving the impression that she must be at least ten years older than she was. Intangibly is the word, for her complexion was artistically young, her teeth were even and white, her hair was of the most fashionable shade of coppery brown, her clothes were exactly what a well-dressed woman of thirty-five should wear, and her heels were three inches high and three-quarters of an inch across. The heels—plus some small touch of unadmitted rheumatism—accounted for the teetering and tottering. Her voice, as she now addressed Doctor Eaton, was youthfully vivacious, but lowered, as became the voice of one about to tell secrets.

"I see you have been having a visit from Mr. Chaffee, doctor. I suppose he is still working on this awful murder. Wasn't it just *impossible!*"

If that suggestion made to Alice in Wonderland relative to words being paid extra when they work overtime had ever been adopted by Mrs. Pellinger, she would have owed a sad bill to two. Mrs. Pellinger, although she never hesitated to dilate upon either literature or art, was not a person of wide vocabulary. Things to be commended were "wonderful." Things to be condemned were "impossible." She had a little way of pronouncing both words that made them almost sound as if they meant something; the second syllable of "impossible" and the first syllable of "wonderful," when she spoke them, were emphatically accented and long drawn out.

Doctor Eaton turned at her voice, and tried to smile agreeably. As she obviously expected it, he introduced Worth.

"Oh, I'm so glad to meet you, Mr. Worth!" she gushed. "I have heard so much about you—your writings and everything. I think they are *wonderful*. And they say you were a wonderful tennis player, although that, I'm afraid, was a little before my time."

Worth registered a mental impression that if she had ever played tennis she must have retired and been observing games from the grand stand when he was in the junior tournaments. He bowed politely, and said nothing.

"I just *had* to come and speak to you," Mrs. Pellinger went on to Doctor Eaton, "because I heard last night that you and Mr. Worth were up in the Parke boy's room when Mr. Chaffee came. Is it true he has been arrested for the murder and that they are keeping him a prisoner up there?"

"On the contrary, he is entirely free to come and go as he likes," the doctor assured her. "It is unfortunate that such a story got around."

"Isn't it?" she said. "Sometimes I cannot understand how such things get even started. But he hasn't come downstairs to-day."

"Perhaps the piazza hasn't heard that he was assaulted by a highwayman, who bruised his face somewhat," remarked the doctor. He felt it would be a good thing to disseminate the story now, and knew of no better way to do it.

"Dear me, no! Wasn't that *impossible!* And the man robbed him?"

"Fortunately, no. Parke held his own in the fight."

"Wasn't that *wonderful!* Then who, Doctor Eaton, is suspected of the murder?"

The doctor shook his head. "I am not in the chief's confidence," he said. "I think he has some clews, but he wouldn't tell me, naturally."

Mrs. Pellinger was unable to quite conceal her disappointment. "Do you know," she said, "when I saw you and Mr. Chaffee together, I thought maybe you could tell me the latest news. Quite in confidence, of course."

"Too bad we can't."

"Mr. Chaffee didn't mention anybody as being under suspicion; anybody here at the inn, I mean?" she persisted.

"My dear Mrs. Pellinger! Whom at the inn could he suspect? I assure you young Parke had nothing to do with it."

"I wasn't thinking of Mr. Parke." She looked about her to assure herself there was no one else within earshot. "I haven't mentioned this to a single soul," she said. "Not one single soul. But I heard something last night that —— Perhaps, if you think it was of any importance, you would want to tell it to Mr. Chaffee."

Doctor Eaton, who doubted that she could have known anything whatever for twelve hours, some of them waking ones, without mentioning it to a soul, inclined his head politely. She needed no further encouragement.

"It is this," she went on in a hushed voice. "I was sitting out on the piazza last evening, as I always do on dance nights—I seldom dance myself, you know, although when I was a little younger—I happened to be sitting on the west piazza, and I was not very far from Mr. Williams and his young man—Mr. Camblin, you know. I heard something Mr. Williams said. Of course it may be of importance, and it may not; I suppose probably it is not. But the more I have thought of it the

more it has seemed I ought to speak of it. After all, I don't know this Mr. Williams very well. I am not at all sure he is the sort of person we are accustomed to associating with here at the inn. I do know that *sometimes* he is *impossible!*"

Both Worth and the doctor wondered idly what slight the imperturbable Williams had put upon Mrs. Pellinger to so offend her. She pitched her voice still lower, and continued, without seeming to expect any reply:

"I wasn't paying any attention to what they said, you understand—one does not pay attention to the light talk one hears on hotel piazzas—and I don't know, of course, that they were speaking of Mr. Carruth. And yet, as I was thinking it over after I was in my room last night, it seems to me as though it were after Mr. Carruth had come and before he left. And I hear the murderer stole his valuable waistcoat buttons. Is that true?"

"Yes," the doctor replied, repressing a desire to look at his watch.

"Well, this little sentence that I heard—of course it may not be of the slightest importance—was spoken by Mr. Williams. I don't know what had been said before it, but suddenly either the music stopped or he raised his voice or perhaps my ears just caught it, and I heard him say: 'Whatever the cost, I'm going to get those buttons.' Do you suppose he could have meant Mr. Carruth's buttons?"

"It doesn't seem probable, does it?" Worth said.

"And then he said he would have to hurry, and it wasn't but a few minutes later that I noticed him get up and go away. He went out of the hotel; I wasn't curious, of course, but I just happened to see him. In fact, I didn't give the matter a second thought until long after I had heard about poor young Carruth."

"But if he left the hotel right away, he went before Carruth did," suggested Worth.

"He didn't go immediately, and I am pretty sure that Mr. Carruth and Grace Hartley had gone home before he left; I remember noticing them go and hearing her say her mother was not feeling well, and after that, I think it was, I saw Mr. Williams was gone, and then Mr. Camblin went, too. But I have told you all I heard. I suppose they dropped their voices or perhaps somebody came up and spoke to me or I became interested in something else. At any rate, that was all—that he intended to get 'those buttons' at any cost, and that he would have to hurry. Except that somebody else was after them, too. A gentleman named Long, I think he said."

"You don't recall his exact words, I suppose," insinuated Worth. "Not that it would really be likely to have any bearing on such a thing, but——"

The young-old lady wrinkled her brows. "I *think* he said, 'With old Long after them, too, I'll have to hurry.' But perhaps it was 'O. Long.' Dear me! I wish I had realized that it might be of importance."

"I doubt if it is," Doctor Eaton assured her, bearing in mind the advisability of not encouraging her to repeat the tale on the piazzas. Still with this idea, he lowered his voice. "If I were you, Mrs. Pellinger, I would not mention the matter. Mr. Williams is a rather peculiar man. He might be offended if it came to his ears, and you never can tell what a man who has been away from civilization as much as he has will do or say."

"That is gospel truth, doctor," she agreed. "I suppose it is the lack of having been here so much of his life that makes him sometimes so—so *impossible!*"

Worth deftly introduced the subject of a mythical telephone message that he expected, and asked if he might be excused. Doctor Eaton succeeded in getting away with him. As they turned to reënter the inn, Mrs. Pellinger, smiling brightly and youthfully at those whom she passed, was sauntering uncertainly back to her chair in the shade.

"Will she mention it?" Worth asked.

"I hardly think so. I fancy that to tell the story would be wonderful, but even the thought of what a scandal it

would mean if Williams were to call her to account for it in public would make it impossible. Well, what do you think?"

"Is Williams left-handed?"

"I don't know."

"I have to go to town. You are going to be around the inn all the afternoon. Keep your eye on him, will you? Especially if he goes into the writing room. See which hand he uses."

"It doesn't seem possible a man of his standing could be concerned in a thing like this."

"What some collectors will do, if the object to be attained is coveted badly enough, passes all understanding. Their desire for possession becomes a mania. And Williams is no hothouse product, you know; he has knocked around in far-away places; I imagine he has seen his share of ruthlessness. I don't know whom to suspect in this case any more than Chaffee does, you understand, so I suspect everybody who could have had anything to do with it. Parke is right-handed. Camblin, you probably noticed, wrote the name of that Chinese author with his right hand. It will be helpful to know whether Williams is left-handed or not. The fact that he talked so calmly to us a little while ago could mean that he was utterly innocent of any knowledge whatever of this matter, and it could mean merely that he has an iron nerve and a face like a graven image—and he has those, anyway."

Worth, as soon as he reached his room, called Doctor Ade on the telephone. The doctor was at home, and expected to be until two o'clock. He would be very willing to let Mr. Worth examine the knots in the cord that he had carefully put away in his safe. Worth announced that he might be expected to arrive within a few minutes.

He called the residence of James Grafton. Mr. Grafton's voice replied.

"I am trying to help Chief Chaffee a bit," Worth explained, after he had identified himself. "Can you tell me whether Carruth had any callers yesterday or last evening?"

"None while I was here; at least that I know of," replied Grafton. "You know he went to town right after luncheon, and did not return until just about dinner time; some one might have called on him while he was away. I'll have to ask Omoshi. He isn't here at this moment, but I'll ask him as soon as he comes in, and phone you, if you wish."

"Pardon me. Whom are you going to ask?"

"My Jap boy. He was here all the afternoon and evening, and he would know if there were any callers."

"If you don't mind, would you be willing to wait and ask him in my presence? On second thought, I will come over to your house, if it is convenient. When do you expect him back?"

"He has gone on a short errand; he ought to be here within a half hour."

"I will be there in just about that time."

Worth replaced the receiver, and at once left the room. As he was closing his door, a quick, nervous step sounded in the hall, and out of the shadow in the direction of the elevator came Harris Camblin.

Worth nodded. "Are we neighbors?" he asked politely.

"Evidently," smiled Camblin. "Mr. Williams and I have the suite at the end of the hall—two doors beyond." He passed on to the suite, unlocked the door, and disappeared. Worth turned in the opposite direction, went down in the elevator, and set out for Doctor Ade's.

With the tragic exhibit before him on the doctor's desk, he proceeded, without disturbing them, to make a careful examination of the knots. If, in a sail-boating youth, he had not taken lessons in rope manipulation from an ancient sailor of the old school, he would have been quite unable to make out their intricacies.

Two knots composed the noose; one of them, although complicated, bore some resemblance to a knot that was familiar, although it was not exactly the same. The second, however, was entirely foreign to his experience. With the bit of line he had begged from

Parke in his hand, he labored to reproduce this peculiar twist and tangle of twine. Dozens of times he failed; then suddenly he got it. The object of its peculiar construction was instantly apparent. When the noose was pulled taut, the other knot so engaged this one that slipping even the slightest fraction of an inch was beyond the bounds of possibility. One sharp jerk, once the loop was about the victim's throat, and with perfect assurance the murderer could use both his hands for other purposes. It was perfect—fiendishly perfect.

He reproduced both knots in his own piece of cord. When he had finished he carefully stowed in his pocket a bowstring that probably looked exactly as the fatal one did before the assassin had cast it about Carruth's neck and given the pull of execution.

He spoke to Doctor Ade, who had been called out of the room while he was at work, handed over the official exhibit, and looked at his watch. He had just time to get across the street to Grafton's house inside the limit he had set. It came to him that if he caught the one-three he would have to forego his luncheon, but he had breakfasted so late that this did not seem a very great hardship.

A Japanese opened the Grafton door in response to his ring. He was a well-mannered, soft-footed youth; a dark-skinned young man, clearly of the servant class—not at all the light-complexioned, highly intelligent sort who are so often to be found engaged in surprisingly menial occupations in the vicinity of fortresses, navy yards, and army posts. With his growing suspicion of international conspiracy, Worth would not have been surprised to find the boy of this other type; he by no means eliminated him, as it was, but he thought, as the servant showed him into a darkened reception room and went to summon his employer, that any person who wanted to hire an agent to commit such a crime would hesitate before engaging this Omoshi; he might be willing, but he would hardly prove quick thinking or adept in explanations.

Mr. Grafton came in a second later, followed by the servant.

"Omoshi," he said. "Mr. Worth wants to ask you a few questions. Answer them, please."

The Japanese waited respectfully, expressionless.

"I only want to ask who called here to see Mr. Carruth yesterday," said Worth pleasantly. "Either while Mr. Carruth was here or while he was away."

The Japanese answered gravely, as became one who spoke of a deceased guest of his house. He did not hesitate.

"Yisser. Nobody come to see Misser Ca'uth while he is here. One man come late in afternoon to see him, while he is in Noo Yok. Chinese gentleman. Name is Wong Chew."

"What time?"

"Late in affernoon, early evenin'. About hop pas' sikis."

"Who is Wong Chew?"

Omoshi allowed himself the slightest shrug. "I nev' see Wong Chew before, an' he di'n' say."

"What kind of looking man?"

"Tall, fine-lookin' Chinaman—mebbe fitty-fi', mebbe sikisty year ol'. Dress' ve'y nice. Not Chinese clo's; American clo's. He ask is Misser Ca'uth in; I say no. He say he want ve'y much see Misser Ca'uth on matter business. He ask when will he be home. I say don' know, mebbe dinner, mebbe not till late—Misser Ca'uth di'n' say when he go when he come back. He say he have to get terain at hop pas' se'en. He wait till quatta pas' se'en; he say then for me please tell Misser Ca'uth he want see him firs' thing Monnay monnin'—on business. He say ask Misser Ca'uth telephone or come see him. He give me card. 'At's all. He go away."

"Where is the card?"

"I give it Misser Ca'uth when he come home, dinner time. I don't know what he did with it. It says Wong Chew, Fi'th Avenoo. I read English little," he explained ingenuously.

"He didn't come back in the evening?"

"I di'n' see him, an' I was here all evenin'. I guess he took terain hop pas' se'en."

"Is there a train to town at half past seven?" Worth asked Grafton.

"Yes."

"Would he have met Carruth on his way to get it? What time did Carruth get here?"

"Lee came out on the train that arrives in Forest Gardens at seven-thirty-six, and I think he said it was a few minutes late. I had been delayed, too, at the clubhouse, and we both had very little time to dress. Dinner was a trifle late; we did not sit down until quarter after eight."

Worth turned again to Omoshi. "And that was the only caller Mr. Carruth had, you say?"

"No. That's only one in affernoon, early evenin'. Misser Williams come in late evenin'."

"What Mr. Williams?"

"Gentleman live at inn. Ve'y nice man—Misser Williams. He speak to me in Japanese an' ask how long I come to America an' how I like. Firs' American gentleman I ever see speak to me in Japanese." Omoshi's inflection gave the impression that some matter of appropriate gratuity might also have accompanied the kind inquiries.

"Just when was he here?" It was Grafton who asked the question.

"About ten, fitteen minutes before you an' Misser Finch come in. Mebbe li'."

The look that Grafton gave Worth was eloquent. He was remembering that he and Finch had met Williams walking toward the inn as they came out of the clubhouse.

CHAPTER XI.

A FRIGHTFULNESS COMMITTEE.

Worth resumed the questioning, not too gravely. He did not intend, if the Japanese were innocent of any intimate knowledge of the tragedy, to lead him to think the inquiries were especially significant. "What did Mr. Williams say, please?"

"He only ask is Misser Ca'uth home. I say no, he go right away affer dinner an' don' come home yet. Misser Williams say nemmine. He say he jus' happen be passin' an' think he come in an' call on Misser Ca'uth. He out on li'l' walk, he says. He guess he go on an' keep walkin'; it's pretty night, he says. He probably see Misser Ca'uth to-day, to-morrow, some time."

"And was there anybody else here yesterday afternoon or last evening?"

"No, sir. Nobody else. Jus' that two."

Worth nodded to Grafton, who said: "That's all, Omoshi." The Japanese turned away.

Acting on sudden impulse, Worth addressed him sharply as he neared the door: "Omoshi, see here! What kind of knots are these?"

The servant turned to find Worth standing before him, holding out the cord with its unusual knots. He looked at the cord, then into Worth's face. His look was perplexity rather than the blank lack of expression of the Oriental who does not wish to understand. He reached out his hand for the cord, looked at the knots, passed the cord back.

"I don' know," he said simply. "I haven' see knots like that ever, I guess. I don' know much about knots."

Worth returned the bit of fishline to his pocket. "That is all," he said. "Thank you."

When a door had audibly closed behind the departing Omoshi some distance to the rear of the house, Grafton spoke:

"What was that about knots?"

"This cord in my pocket is like the one that strangled Carruth, knots and all. They are unusual knots—perhaps of an Eastern character. I merely wanted to observe whether or not he would appear to recognize them. Of course, if he did, I did not expect him to say so."

"You don't suspect Omoshi of——"

"No. Not especially. He was one of those who might have had opportunity to do it, however, and he is an Oriental. I don't think he knows anything more about the matter than he

has told us. Just where was Williams, Mr. Grafton, when you met him?"

"Almost exactly in front of the clubhouse."

"Was he hurrying?"

"He didn't seem to be; I didn't notice him particularly."

"He was going toward the inn? That is to say, he was coming from this direction?"

"Yes. Could he have passed down on the opposite side of the street—the same as Finch and I came up—and missed seeing Carruth? Or is it possible that he——"

"Anything is possible, but not all things are probable. Is there any way that Williams could have reached that spot where you saw him without going down Lafayette Avenue past the spot where the body was found?"

"Oh, yes. If, as he said, he was out for a walk and passing this house, he could have continued on west to the end of this block, turned to the right, and come down to Jenney Street through either Evergreen or Molyneux. He would still pass the clubhouse on his way to the inn in the same direction as though he had gone to Jenney Street by the avenue."

"Will you ask Omoshi which direction Williams took when he left here? If he went down, he must have either met Carruth or passed the place where he lay. If he went up, your suggestion is probably correct."

Grafton hurried toward the rear of the house, and was back in a moment. "He says he doesn't know," he reported. "He closed the door while Williams was going down the walk, and didn't notice in which direction he turned."

"I have to go to town," Worth remarked, "and I have barely time to stop at the inn for a moment and still catch the train. May I suggest that, for the present, it would be wise not to mention what we have learned from your servant?"

Grafton agreed promptly. "If there are any developments," he said, "I hope you will advise me. I am prepared to pay amply for the evidence that will convict the murderer. I feel, in a way, as if this had struck my own family. I don't mean that I had any especially deep affection for Lee, but he was my boy's friend. You understand."

Worth nodded. "As to any matter of reward," he said, "that is between you and Chaffee, if I am successful in assisting him. There is one question I would like to ask you. Who is Carruth's principal heir, if you know? Who will become possessed of his property now?"

"He has no close relatives, and it isn't probable he had made a will. I don't know who will come into his estate; it will presumably have to be administered by a court for the benefit of distant kin."

"Thank you. Now, if you will excuse me, I must hurry."

A few moments later, Worth, consulting his watch as he passed through the door, entered the inn and asked that a taxicab be summoned in a hurry to take him to the station. He rushed to his room and put in a hurry call for New York, which, probably due to it being Sunday, he was fortunate enough to get sent up in five minutes. While he was waiting for the phone bell to ring he threw open a steamer trunk and pawed hastily into the bottom of it, finding in a corner three or four paper-bound books and pamphlets. They included two official publications of Harvard University—one a book containing the present addresses of the members of his class, the other a list of all the Harvard brethren of his fraternity.

He skimmed them hastily, and found the name he sought, making a memorandum of the address that was opposite it. Tossing the books back into the trunk and locking it, he searched for the same name in the telephone directory, and set down its number. He sprang to the telephone at its summons.

The friendly voice that answered him when he had identified himself was the voice of a man high in the New York branch of the Federal department of justice, department of investigation.

"I am coming to town shortly—barely time now to get my train," Worth told him, "and I want to see you on a matter of some importance. Where will you be at two-thirty?"

"At the office. There are no such things as Sundays and holidays for us these days, you know."

"May I see you there if I call at about that time?"

"Of course. Any time. You know it."

Worth said good-by without further explanation. He made his way downstairs and out toward his waiting automobile.

Doctor Eaton hailed him as he was about to jump in, and came hurrying down the walk.

"I thought you might want to know before you left," he said, too low for the chauffeur to hear. "Williams has been writing letters. He is right-handed."

"Thank you," Worth replied. "I have just time to get the train; I'll see you as soon as I get back. By the way, have I any margin of time for the one-three?" he stopped to ask the chauffeur.

"Not a minute."

Worth handed the young man a bill. "There's the pay in advance; no change. I'm going to take one minute and trust you to make it." To Eaton he continued hurriedly:

"Do you remember Doctor Li Kuen, who was in our class and who didn't go back to China, but set up a practice in New York? A little, skinny Chinaman, with funny, old-fashioned spectacles?"

"Very well. I've seen him within a year or so. He isn't skinny any more, and his spectacles are the latest style of tortoise rims. He has prospered."

"He is a man of good standing, then?"

Doctor Eaton shrugged. "I have never heard anything about his standing as a man, but it is all right as a physician and surgeon."

"Thanks. I may try to find him this afternoon—to continue my lessons in Chinese history." He raised his voice to the chauffeur, who was leaning over his wheel, his feet and hands ready for the word. "All right, son. Let her go!"

He tried to wave to Doctor Eaton, an act rendered practically impossible by the driver, who instantly gave the car "all she had," and slammed Worth into a corner with the jerk. The doctor was smiling delightedly at the picture as Worth, regaining his balance and rescuing the glasses that had fallen from his nose, looked back from the first corner.

That this violent treatment had been necessary was proved by the fact that Worth caught the train by the narrowest possible margin. As he found a seat and settled himself in it, Chief Chaffee came up and sat beside him.

"I saw you comin', and it certainly looked like you wasn't goin' to catch it," he commented. "Well, here I am goin' back to town again. Geraghty sent for me."

"What has happened?"

"Well, he ain't found McMahon, but he's found what he thinks is good evidence. He's got a watch and some cuff buttons; he wants me to take a look at 'em. I haven't been able to get any perfect description of either the watch or the buttons that were taken off Carruth, but Mr. Grafton told me this morning what he thought they looked like, generally speakin'."

"Where did Geraghty find them?"

"In this Petey Mack's room. It don't seem like he would happen to have a gold watch and a pair of dress-suit cuff buttons there unless they were the same ones, does it?"

"Is there anything more to Geraghty's report?"

"Well, it seems that after I left headquarters this forenoon he makes some inquiries about McMahon, and finds that he's been roomin' lately in a house just off Second Avenue, and he goes to the house. Petey ain't there. It seems he was there some time early this mornin'—nobody knows what time he got in last night, or else, if they do know, they won't admit it—and went away. Geraghty breaks into his room

and finds this watch and these cuff buttons tucked away somewhere. Hid. And he finds out that Mack beat it out of the house not long after somebody give him a mornin' paper."

The chief shook his head pessimistically. "It don't look to me, with all the money he must have in his clothes if he is the right man, but what he could make a get-away somewhere, but Geraghty thinks he ain't left town. Says he ain't the sort that leaves New York. Says he would be lost anywhere else, and that it's a cinch he's hidin' somewhere in the city. He's lookin' for him himself at what you might call his customary ha'nts, and keepin' a watch on the house off Second Avenue, of course, and he's had a general alarm sent out. If Petey is still in town, he says he figures he'll have him before night. I'm going in to headquarters and stay there, I guess. There don't seem to be anything to keep me back in Forest Gardens."

"If you get your man, or if there are any other important developments, do you mind letting me know by telephone? I can tell you where to find me."

Chaffee seeing no objection to this, Worth gave him the telephone numbers of his secret-service friend and of Doctor Li Kuen, without mentioning who either of them were. "If I am not at either of those places, one or the other of them will probably know where I have gone," he instructed. "Let me know especially whether McMahon is left-handed."

Guards, in due time, came through the train, ordering that all windows be closed for the tube. Then came the rushing roar of the passage under the river, the relief from overpressed eardrums that follows, and the quick arrival in the station. Worth and Chaffee separated at the corner of Seventh Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street, the chief announcing that he was going down to detective headquarters on a Sixth Avenue L, and Worth signaling a taxi that prowled up to the curb in search of prey.

Federal Agent Mather, upon whom Worth called at the government offices, looked not at all like a law officer, but very much like a busy business man. Worth told him the story as briefly as he could, leaving out all nonessentials. His friend listened alertly. Worth concluded with a concise summary:

"Now what I ask your opinion, advice, and assistance about is this: Do you think the soap-box traitors were after Carruth, as they have been after other men who helped break up their meetings? If so, were Peter McMahon and a German a committee to see that Carruth got what frightfulnsess it was decided was coming to him? And who was the German, and where is Petey Mack?"

"It isn't so difficult to reply to some of your questions as you thought it would be," the official rather surprisingly answered. "The soap-box traitors *were* after Carruth. They selected a committee to attend to it consisting of one Sinn Feiner and one German. The German's name is Albert Weggmann. I don't know where Petey Mack is, but Weggman is due to arrive here within the next ten or fifteen minutes. One of our men is bringing him down now from the Bronx."

CHAPTER XII.

A FRIEND OF LIBERTY.

There was friendly amusement in the Federal officer's eyes as he surveyed Worth's countenance. "A little surprised?" he queried.

"Surprised *and* astonished—and there is a difference," Worth said. "Apparently I haven't told you any news at all; you knew it all the time."

"On the contrary, most of what you have told me is news so far as I am concerned. While we presumed this McMahon and Weggmann were likely to have been responsible for Carruth's death, we had no details of the crime other than what appeared in the newspapers. It wasn't until nearly noon that we entered the case at all. We might not have been on it yet but for the fact that one of our men—he is a trusted member of the particular branch of England haters who are engineering

these pro-German meetings on the street—chanced to know of the appointment of a committee to *strafe* Carruth. He was out late last night, and didn't get up until nearly noon to-day. The minute he read of Carruth's death he got busy. He personally cannot appear in the case at all naturally; it would ruin his future usefulness in watching this particular nest of traitors. But other men went out at once to look for both McMahon and Weggmann. McMahon seems to have made himself scarce, as you already know. Weggmann, however, was at home, and did not seem to have even considered trying to escape. That is all I know about it. We'll have him in here and question him as soon as he arrives."

"I should say your department had not been asleep," Worth admiringly commented.

"Sleep!" the other cried. "I am averaging six hours a night, and some of our people are getting along with less. We could use ten times as many operatives in this office as we have, and they would all have to miss some sleep. It is a tribute to German efficiency that she is keeping us busy in more directions than the public even dreams of. If there is any bet Wilhelmstrasse has overlooked I haven't heard of it."

Worth took the knotted cord out of his pocket and laid it before Mather, explaining in a word how he had copied the fatal noose. "Did you ever see knots exactly like those?" he asked.

The official examined them curiously, finally getting a microscope to study their construction. "No," he said. "I never did."

"It struck me that perhaps they are Oriental; the East always has been partial to the bowstring."

"Perhaps. I never worked in the Orient, you know. It is all I can do to keep track of how people think and what they do in little old New York and points a few miles north, south, and west. There isn't anybody here in the office to-day who has ever been in Asia, but one of them will be in to-morrow. If you want to bring it in again in the forenoon——"

"I will," Worth promised, returning it carefully to his pocket, "although, if we find that McMahon understands the construction of complicated knots, made left-handed, we won't need to. Weggmann, I feel sure, is not guilty, except perhaps as an accomplice before the fact. The station master distinctly heard him say to McMahon that he got the wrong man, and we have Parke's story, substantiated by his black eye, to prove it."

A buzzer sounded, and the officer picked up his phone. "Bring him right in," he said. "Here he is. Stay while we question him."

A stocky, light-complexioned, sullen prisoner came through the door, a broad-shouldered, sharp-eyed young man at his elbow. He was handcuffed, and a certain dishevelment of his clothing, especially in the neighborhood of his collar and tie, indicated he had not started upon his journey from the Bronx without something more than an oral protest.

Mather sat back in his chair and stared the prisoner coldly in the eye without speaking. Weggmann stood it a moment or so, then spoke first. "See here, mister!" he cried. "Why am I arrested like this and hustled into an automobile and brought here and not to a police station, and not allowed to have a lawyer—or anything? Why is it? I have done nothing against any law. If so, what?" Mather, still staring, did not reply. "Vell, what?" he demanded vehemently. "What am I charged mit?"

"Murder," the officer replied coldly.

"Murder! Ha, ha! Is it a joke? I tell you, vhen I get my lawyer, it isn't any joke, believe me! Murder! Who is it that I murder?"

"Leland T. Carruth."

Weggmann's face transparently expressed first astonishment, then stupefaction, then a shadow of fear.

"What?" he shouted. "Carruth, he is murdered? When? By who?"

"You know perfectly well by whom. It's no use, Weggmann. We know all about the meeting where you and another man were selected to go to For-

est Gardens, and we have witnesses who saw you there, and we have the body. You have cheered for the *Lusitania* murders at the last meeting you will ever attend. It's the chair for you."

The German's face reddened, then paled. He was not unintelligent.

"But I—— Who says Carruth was murdered?" he demanded. "So help me, I didn't know it."

"That's nonsense, when it was in all the morning papers."

"N' Yawk newspapers! I don't read 'em, not since the war. They are full of English lies. I take only true newspapers."

"Where were you last night?"

He hesitated. "That is to be proven after I have a lawyer," he said, with an effort at bluster.

"Just as you say. Of course, if you did it, you wouldn't expect to give evidence against yourself."

"But I didn't! I didn't even know about it. Listen, mister! On my word, I didn't see this Carruth since—since a long time."

"Turn him over to the police, charged with murder," commanded Mather. The agent who had brought Weggmann in touched him on the arm.

"Wait a minute!" begged the man. "It wasn't me that did it. It must have been——" He snapped his lips shut. "You are trying to play tricks on me," he declared. "It is a fake. There is nobody murdered. It is a scheme to stop these meetings for truth that has been held. I know. It is a dodge."

For answer, Mather pushed a newspaper across his desk, his finger indicating the story of the Carruth murder. "You can read English," he remarked.

As the German read, his face grayed perceptibly. When he looked up from the paper there were beads of sweat on his forehead.

"Say!" he almost whispered. "I ain't no murderer. Honest, I ain't. Just because I don't agree with some of you other Americans about this war that don't make me a murderer, does it? Does it?" he repeated more loudly.

"As a matter of fact, I should say it did," Mather replied dryly. "A man who would kill thousands of his fellow countrymen by trying to slow up their war would surely be capable of killing one."

"But——" Weggmann stopped, and they waited in silence while he essayed to collect his thoughts. "Vell—I admit I was in Forest Gardens," he said finally. "But I didn't commit no murder."

"When did you go there, and why did you go there, and who went with you?"

"I went——" Anger began to possess him. Slowly his mind was grasping the jeopardy into which he had been put by the act of another. His face flushed. "It must have been that *schwein* McMahon," he said, half to himself.

"See here!" Mather told him sharply. "If you did it, keep your mouth shut until you get a lawyer. If you didn't, tell us who did, and you'll get as fair treatment as you're entitled to. And make up your mind right away, because we're busy."

"Fair treatment! That's a promise!" cried Weggmann. "And the government has to keep its promises. Vell—I didn't do it. I didn't know anybody was going to do it. Another man and me went to give this Carruth a good beating, because he is a *verdammte Englander* who pulled our speaker off a box at a meeting. We are as good Americans as anybody. I am as good an American as anybody. I was born right here in N' Yawk. But because England——"

"You may omit the Friends of Liberty speech," Mather interrupted. "So you went to Forest Gardens to give Carruth a beating. What then?"

"So we followed him from N' Yawk on the train and to his house, and waited for him, but after supper another man came out mit him and walked mit him nearly to the big hotel. There were too many electric lights when the other man left him—the old man. He went into the hotel and danced a long time. We saw him from across the way, in the shadow. Then he came

out, but mit a girl. He went home mit her, and we followed. Then we did not stay together."

"Why?"

"We didn't want to go and wait too near the house, and we were afraid he might go the other way when he came out. So Mack went over toward the house where he lived, and I went back around the corner. But I nefer saw him."

"Did Mack see him?"

"He said not. Say, mister, I didn't mention any names. I didn't tell you who the other man was. Did I?"

"You said McMahon went over toward Carruth's house. Don't worry; we knew who was with you. Well? Then what happened?"

Weggmann considered. Slowly it was reflected upon his stolid face that he was considering the consequences of admitting his attack on Parke, and that it was dawning upon him that, even though he might be punished for the assault, it would probably acquit him of the murder on another street.

"I thought I had him," he confessed, "and we had a fight. So we rolled into the light, and I saw it was somebody else. So I beat it." He shook his head, puzzled. "I ain't figured it out how it was that it was somebody else," he said, "but I swear it was. About as big as Carruth—and he come from the same direction—but altogether a different-lookin' feller. And he was dressed different. Carruth had a dress suit on, and the other feller hadn't."

"Have you seen McMahon since?"

"Yes." Weggmann answered this question promptly; he seemed to feel that he had confessed all the particulars that could count against him. "We come back on the train together. We didn't come straight through, but went over to Long Island City and took the ferry. He went home and I went home. But he said he didn't see him, either."

"All right," Mather said. "Oh, Mr. Steere!" A door that stood ajar, apparently opening into a closet, came wide open, and a young man with a notebook in his hand stepped out. "You have all that was said?"

"Yes, sir."

"Telephone the police to come and get him," Mather instructed the agent who had made the arrest. "Tell the sergeant or whoever is in charge that we'll have a transcript of his statement sent over within an hour or so. And tell them if anything happens that he doesn't get promptly convicted, or if there is any chance of his getting out on bail, to let us know. When the State gets through with him we want to see that he stays in a safe place for the duration of the war."

The young man took Weggmann away. When they had gone, Mather spoke to Worth.

"All of which is quite interesting and cumulative," he said, "but, as we practically knew it before, we stand just about where we did."

"It is comforting to have him verify what we thought we knew," Worth replied. "Now I think I will look up those Chinese angles I spoke of. If Mack confesses when they get him, no harm will be done. If he doesn't, we'll be a little way, at least, on another road. May I use your phone?"

Doctor Li Kuen's number was promptly answered, and a moment brought the doctor to the instrument. In a few words Worth recalled himself and said that he had a matter of moment upon which he desired to consult him, with time an important essence in the contract.

"By all means," Doctor Li said. "Come at once; I have no appointments for this afternoon. I shall be very glad indeed to renew our old acquaintance. I am delighted to hear your voice again."

Within fifteen minutes Worth rang the bell at the entrance of a building on the edge of the downtown Chinese quarter, and was ushered by a clattering, silk-garbed boy into a queerly Americanized corner of the Orient.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The Infant's Progress

By William A. Shryer

Author of "The Campbells Are Coming," Etc.

"Unlucky in love, lucky at cards," said Squib, summing up his young life, and then set about proving it with Red Dog

ARTHUR B. QUILLER, better known to his intimates as "Squib," arose reluctantly from his luxuriant bed, donned a gaudy bath robe, and sauntered yawningly into the still smoke-laden atmosphere of his comfortable sitting room. Evidences of an exciting session of Red Dog littered the room, explaining the late hour of Squib's awakening, as the party had not disbanded until well after two. For, as every one knows, a man must have his eight hours' sleep, especially if he be a bachelor with no responsibilities of an annoying character.

It may as well be admitted that nothing ever worried Squib, and why should it? Still in his minority, a monthly allowance of three hundred dollars to spend as he pleased would be almost enough to satisfy any natural, healthy youth. Blessed with a guardian more busy than critical, calls for extraordinary relief of occasional necessity were rarely disregarded, for Squib was the prospective heir to an estate conservatively estimated at seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and one constantly increasing under the efficient direction of his father's old-time friend, Ellwood Mason.

Squib's winnings of the previous evening effectually postponed any present occasion for financial concern, however, as the engaging pastime of Red Dog was his most profitable avocation. It was well toward the end of September, and the ninety-six dollars he had succeeded in annexing the night before promised ample sinews of war for the remaining interval until the first of the month.

With this thought pleasingly uppermost, the handsome Mr. Quiller prepared to don his correct morning attire, cogitating the while on the problem of eating a light breakfast or delaying it for a more satisfying repast as a combination breakfast and lunch at the University Club at noon.

He was interrupted in the contemplation of this important question by the entrance of his friend Burton Ainsmith, whose efficiency in business circles was a constant marvel to the less aggressive Squib. He and "Slicker" Ainsmith had attended the University of Michigan together, belonged to the same fraternity, and had left that institution of learning simultaneously. Slicker had graduated with honors at twenty-three, while Squib had terminated his connection with Ann Arbor life at the request of an unappreciative faculty.

Contented with any minor business association, so long as it bore promise of eventual profit in the automobile line, the acquisitive Ainsmith had accepted a position as salesman with the Fordick Garage the previous June, and had already developed a reputation for financial acumen that guaranteed an early commercial success. Naturally able, Slicker was not oblivious to the element of wisdom constantly afforded by the advice of his father, for Burton Ainsmith, senior, was an attorney of no mean ability, with an experience in general business practices rivaled by few.

Due to a suggestion emanating from a discussion with his watchful parent, Slicker had decided to discuss with

Squib a plan that had been germinating within his busy mind for some time. An especial significance had been given to his thoughts in this regard early that morning. Even at the risk of disturbing the peaceful slumbers of Squib, he had hastened to the latter's apartment, trusting that the afterglow of satisfaction on account of his clean-up of the night before might temper any possible feeling of annoyance his friend might be inclined to exhibit.

"I say, Squib," Slicker greeted his slothful friend, "pile into your duds and I'll race you down to the club for an eye opener and a little snack. Got a little business proposition to prod up your waning cerebrations. It's important, and one of the first rules of business is to make sure you're not talking to an empty stomach."

"What's the wheeze, Slicker?" responded Squib yawningly. "I just got up, and the thought of food doesn't seem to appeal. Besides, I should worry about business matters. Got ninety-six bones and not a care on earth."

"That's exactly why I'm here," grinned the Slicker. "I'm looking for a bloated capitalist, and you're elected."

Despite his protestations, Squib was jollied and pushed into a toilet of more celerity than that to which he was accustomed, and within twenty-five minutes had regaled himself with a bracer and a bit of food at the solicitation of his eager companion, who leaned across the table in the club breakfast room and consented to explain the occasion for such unusual behavior.

"Here's the dope, Squib," he explained. "Father is attorney for the Keromobile people. You've heard a lot about kerosene motors, but these people have the goods, and in about four months they're going to precipitate a regular riot in automobile circles. They have invented a kerosene motor that is absolutely perfect, and have designed a new type of car that will hit the trade right in the eye. Father is no optimist, but it's got him going, and he predicts the company is going to coin millions before it is six months old."

"Back up, Slicker," protested Squib. "I'm no stock gambler. You couldn't induce me to buy a share of stock if it were a nickel a share."

"Say, you bonehead, who's asking you to buy any stock?" remonstrated Slicker. "Besides, there isn't any for sale. That's not the point at all. Father prevailed on them this morning to let me have the Detroit agency, and, believe me, it will mean fifty thousand dollars a year, if it means a cent."

"Sounds good," retorted Squib. "Why don't you take it?"

"That's just the point. I haven't got the money. I'd have to buy and pay for five cars at eight hundred and ninety dollars apiece to get the agency, and, what's more, would have to lease a suitable place to sell 'em. But listen! Fordick wants to sell out. His father-in-law wants him to go out to Los Angeles, and he has agreed to go by February 1st if he can dispose of the garage profitably by that time. I talked with him about it this morning, and he's willing to take twenty-two hundred dollars for the place, good will and all. It's a bargain, too, for he's knocking down not less than three hundred dollars a month clear. I want you to dig up the coin and I'll contribute the experience, and we'll split on the profits. It'll put us both on Easy Street for life."

"But, Slick," remonstrated his now interested companion, "I haven't got a cent in the world but the ninety-six dollars I won last night. Let's see," he interrupted, figuring on the tablecloth. "Five cars at eight hundred and ninety dollars means forty-four hundred and fifty dollars, and twenty-two hundred dollars more for the garage makes sixty-six hundred and fifty dollars. Why, I never saw that much money at one time in my life!"

"Wait a minute!" Slicker interjected. "It's not that much at all. We get twenty per cent off the price of the cars for commission, which makes the total a mere fifty-seven hundred and sixty dollars."

"*Mere's* good," retorted the disgusted Squib. "Might as well be fifty-seven

thousand dollars. Old Mason allows me just three hundred dollars a month, and I'm still a minor."

"That's just it," exclaimed Ainsmith exultantly. "You'll be of age in four months, and we can tie up both deals with a small payment of say about ten per cent. The old man will put that up for us to cinch it, and when you become of age we'll pay the balance."

"My dear boy," replied Squib paternally, "you evidently are unaware of the forethought and prudence displayed by my late-lamented parent. He gave Ellwood Mason the authority to contribute to my modest needs as he thought best up to and no longer than the attainment of my majority. I'll say this much for Mason—he's no crab. Three hundred dollars a month is plenty, and he lets me buy most anything within reason on the side, but he won't give me any more actual cash. However, on my twenty-first birthday, those happy days are over. I'm to get just one hundred dollars a month from then on, until I am able by the sweat of my brow to demonstrate my justification for having been born at all. The designated manifestation must be a contribution to my personal income of not less than one hundred dollars a month, to be earned in the busy marts of trade by my own unaided efforts. I have a fat chance of buying an interest in a business requiring fifty-seven hundred and sixty dollars. Figure it out for yourself."

"Hum!" mused the disappointed salesman. "That's a horse of another color. I don't suppose you have anything of real value to hock, have you?"

"Got that Garber runabout I won at the Elks' raffle," replied Squib, "but it cost only six hundred and sixty dollars new, and I couldn't get over two hundred and fifty dollars for it. You could hardly expect me to disturb my lares and penates, and it's doubtful if they'd bring over a thousand dollars if I tried to sell 'em. I guess you'll have to get somebody else."

"That's too bad," murmured Ainsmith. "Well, I'll just run down and talk this over with dad. He knows more ways of skinning a cat than I do, and maybe he can suggest something."

The two separated, agreeing to meet again at the Ponchartrain grill for a late lunch. The somewhat discouraged Ainsmith repaired to his father's office and placed before him the purport of his interview with Squib. The elder Ainsmith pondered over the information conveyed by his son, and seemed particularly interested in the reference to the Garber car, as well as by the statement that Squib's guardian occasionally sanctioned certain purchases beyond the regular stipulated allowance of the prospective legatee.

After mature deliberation, he consulted a volume of Michigan Reports and followed this by a somewhat intricate exposition of certain possibilities that occurred to his agile mind. The enthusiastic Slicker had no difficulty in digesting the purport of the advice therein contained, and met his friend at lunch with a renewed confidence.

"Listen to me, Squib," he directed, as soon as the two had commenced a discussion of a rather elaborate meal. "The old man was there with the advice. He's got it all figured out to the queen's taste. If you are game and will do just as he says, we'll have the cash by February 1st and a few dollars to blow in besides in the meantime."

To the thoroughly engrossed Squib was then outlined the details of a campaign of finance that gave him a certain pause, but to which he at last gave unrestricted support, subject to an element of doubt that occurred to both of them as potentially disastrous.

"I don't know about Mason standing for my getting a new car," faltered Squib, voicing an expression of their mutual doubts, "but it won't hurt to try. I'll beat it over to his office right away."

"All right," consented Slick as he lighted a cigarette. "Go ahead, and make it strong. I'll fix it with the Garber people to pay me a five-per-cent commission, and you'll buy the most expensive model they've got. Wish your old boat was a Joybelle, but no one will take in that old piece of junk except

the original makers, so that's settled, anyhow."

"You stay right here, and I'll be back as soon as I can."

With some misgivings, Squib sought out his guardian, and returned to report in less than half an hour.

"Got him just right," he announced with glee. "He was busy as the devil and wanted to know what in Tophet I needed a new car for. He said he thought it was all damned nonsense, but didn't refuse to ratify the deal. If you have fixed it up, we'll go get my bus and hike out there."

"It's all right," Slicker commented with satisfaction. "I get five per cent, and they'll allow you three hundred and eighty-five dollars for your old boat."

Arriving at the office and salesroom of the Garber Company, the two picked out the most expensive car on their floor—a Sedan costing eighteen hundred and thirty-five dollars. In accordance with a previously well-learned statement, Squib plainly announced that he was not of age, and therefore unable to make a valid contract for the purchase of the car. He stated, however, that he would leave his old car, pay down fifty dollars in cash to bind the bargain, and that his guardian would furnish the remaining sum of fifteen hundred dollars, on receipt of which Squib would call for the new machine and accept delivery. A telephone message from Mr. Mason confirmed this statement, although the busy guardian took occasion to announce that the purchase was not at his insistence nor with his fullest approval.

Unworried by the mental attitude of Mr. Mason, so long as he agreed to advance the necessary sum to complete their payment, the company accepted the fifty dollars and his old car from Squib, and later in the day turned over to him the new Sedan on receiving fifteen hundred dollars the latter had secured from Mr. Mason for this purpose. At the same time, Slicker collected his five-per-cent commission, amounting to ninety-one dollars and sixty-five cents.

"We'll just let the old man rest for a couple of days," suggested Ainsmith, as the two drove off in the shiny new car. "This is some bus, and we ought to have a pretty good time entertaining with it for the next few months, eh?"

"Yep," assented Squib, "but I don't know about getting old man Mason to stand for that engagement-ring stuff. By the way, who's the girl?"

"We'll get my sister to stand for it. She's a good scout, and since it's going to be all in the family I think she'll be game."

As it developed, the young lady in question was open to reason, seeing no valid excuse for rejecting the pleasure of posing temporarily as the promised bride of such a handsome and attractive youth as Squib. The prospect of wearing a three-carat diamond also appealed to the young lady as having certain feminine advantages, and it was therefore with but little trepidation that Squib appeared before his guardian three days later with an announcement that he contemplated matrimony and desired to seal the compact with a fitting sign of his abiding love and affection. The astonishment of Mr. Mason was considerable and expressed in terms that, under more legitimate circumstances, might have ruffled the self-esteem of the announced swain to a much more practical purpose.

In answer to a question of his guardian as to how he expected to maintain the demands of an establishment of his own, Squib glibly explained that no such contingency was immediately imminent. The engagement, he averred, was purely in the nature of connubial insurance, so to speak. The actual consummation of the project was not to occur until three years hence, and only then upon the attainment of that commercial efficiency so prudently provided for by his late father in his last will and testament.

Upon a realization of this phase of the contemplated venture, the guardian was more complacent, and congratulated the proposed groom most warmly. On the subject of an engagement token, Squib was more or less vague, but re-

ceived the necessary authorization in the moment of parting.

Meeting Slicker at the entrance to his guardian's building, the two repaired to the establishment of the best jeweler in the city, where they examined with great care vast quantities of stones submitted by an obsequious sales person. The jewel at last chosen was quite sufficient in value to warrant the care bestowed upon its sale by the clerk, weighing as it did three carats, an eighth and a sixteenth, and costing sixteen hundred and twenty dollars.

Before closing his bargain, the careful Squib repeated the information he had been at such care to master before the purchase of the automobile, and in this case deposited twenty dollars, that being as much as he felt it prudent to spare of the small sum remaining out of the forty-six dollars to which his previous fifty-dollar payment had reduced him.

A conversation over the phone between the jewelry house and Mr. Mason resulted in the latter's grudging acquiescence to the purchase, but his disapproval of the extravagant amount involved received more expressive treatment from him.

As in the case of the previous purchase, however, the merchants attached much less concern to the sentiments of Mr. Mason than they did to his agreement that he would see to their receipt of the money, and after a stormy session, fifteen minutes later, Squib emerged from the office of his disgruntled guardian with the necessary amount, which he turned over to the jewelers and departed with the stone.

The next step contemplated by the elder Ainsmith and in turn conveyed by him to Slicker was discussed between the latter and Squib for several days. It was conceded that its successful materialization presented certain elements of discouragement that had been entirely lacking in their previous transactions. To overcome a prejudice bound to manifest itself, the two devoted a number of weary hours in thought and study, at last emerging from their mutual concentration with a plan that on its face appealed to them as fairly logical.

With the self-confidence engendered by two successful projects, Squib approached his guardian for the third time within ten days. His proposal, as eventually perfected, contained at least a measure of business argument. It was perhaps because of this that his self-confidence was not greater, but his presentation of the object of his visit was tempered with a certain degree of romance sufficient to maintain an agreeable flow of eloquence.

To his completely astonished guardian Squib announced that he felt it was time for him to face the serious problems of life, and that nothing was more conducive to a feeling of responsibility and civic worthiness than the ownership of actual property of a tangible nature. Real estate, he announced, was the recognized insignia of stability and power. Properly to attain this feeling of personal advancement he felt it incumbent upon him to own and possess actual taxable ground, the purchase of which should be his own and the eventual payment for which should depend on his own unaided efforts. It had been called to his attention that city lots of undoubted value could be had for a very small payment down. In fact, he had looked at some, and decided that the Home Vista Subdivision presented opportunities for unearned increment beyond the wildest dreams of avarice.

To his astonished guardian he announced that he wanted enough to make a first payment down on twenty lots in this incomparable location, as the lots were only twenty dollars a foot, just without the growing bounds of the city limits, and could be purchased for a thousand dollars each or twenty thousand dollars for twenty, with only two thousand dollars as a first payment. He advised that as a prospective married man it behooved him to select a lot on which eventually to build, and that no location pleased his sweetheart more than the spot selected.

To the thoroughly practical Mr. Mason the plan reflected certain advan-

tages, ignorant as he was of the location of Home Vista and its actual potentialities as a home site for one of Squib's eventual affluence. What concerned him most, however, was the solution to be offered by Squib regarding the payments periodically to fall due upon said property. To this Squib was ready with his clinching argument. He had a position in view, and with such a responsibility staring him in the face the acceptance of the position and a faithful performance of its requirements thus became a necessity no honorable gentleman could possibly ignore.

After pondering this unique viewpoint, Mr. Mason at last agreed that Squib's position was very well taken, and agreed to advance the necessary initial installment. Thoroughly elated with this outcome of a most dubious undertaking, Squib hurried to the Fordick Garage and announced his success in glowing terms.

"Fine!" complimented Slicker on receiving this welcome intelligence. "I've got it all fixed up. I was appointed special agent for the Home Vista Subdivision this morning, and they agree to split a ten-per-cent commission with me. I told 'em I couldn't get you to take more than three lots unless they would agree to accept payments on principal and interest semiannually, instead of monthly, as was their custom. That two thousand dollars looked awful big to them, and they couldn't see it get away. We'll run right down and close the deal."

To the subdivision manager of the Home Vista Real Estate Corporation Squib repeated his previous explanation relative to his minority, but assured the man in charge that the first payment would be guaranteed by his guardian, which the latter did by telephone. Ordinarily such a contract would not have been made by a Detroit real-estate firm, but sales just then were rather discouraging in the outlying districts, and the payment of two thousand dollars on one single sale was too great to resist. The proper land contracts were made out, and a commission of one thousand dollars paid to Ainsmith, after Squib returned from Mr. Mason's office with the two thousand dollars.

The two commissions paid to Slicker thus amounted to one thousand and ninety-one dollars and sixty-five cents. Three hundred and fifty-six dollars of this was paid the next day to the Keromobile Company through Mr. Ainsmith, senior, and a contract for the Detroit agency turned over to Slicker by them, calling for the payment of the balance within four months. To Mr. Fordick was paid the sum of five hundred dollars, from whom an option to buy was secured, calling for the payment of the balance by February 1st. This left the two partners two hundred and thirty-five dollars and sixty-five cents of their hard-earned commissions, which they promptly spent in fitting celebration of the success so far attained.

The four months between October 1st and February 1st passed rapidly, the two partners neglecting few opportunities for hospitality, as was their wont, the gratification of which regularly consumed Squib's monthly allowance, as well as reduced the appearance of the new Sedan to that undesirable condition so aptly designated by the secondhand auto dealers "as is."

With the approach of the end of January, the publicity of the Keromobile startled the automobile world to feverish activity. Fifty-eight applicants for exclusive selling rights for the city of Detroit besieged the president of the company with inducements alluring in the extreme. Five of the disappointed applicants approached Slicker Ainsmith with offers for his contract that tempted even that enthusiastic optimist, but as he expressed to his partner: "If it's worth a bonus to them, it's a fortune to us. We'll stick."

Fortified with this pleasing reflection, the two awaited the birthday of Squib with impatience. It occurred on the twenty-sixth of January. On the twenty-seventh Burton Ainsmith, senior, called at the well-furnished bachelor apartment of Arthur B. Quiller, accompanied by his son Slicker. The two found Mr. Quiller ready, and awaiting an enterprise evidently serious

for the three, no smile nor sign of levity being visible to the naked eye. To the subdued Squib, Mr. Ainsmith gave the following instructions as they were departing for the waiting Sedan below:

"Now remember, Mr. Quiller. You will enter with me and say 'I desire to rescind my contract with you entered into between us on the twenty-seventh day of September last, when I was yet a minor. I am returning the merchandise purchased on that date, and it awaits your disposition.' Nothing else will be necessary from you. I will attend to the remaining formalities."

"Yes, sir," murmured the nervous Squib meekly, leading the way to the automobile.

The three gravely entered, and were soon alighting at the office and salesrooms of the Garber Company on Woodward Avenue. The three entered, and, seeking out the manager, Squib repeated word for word the instruction given him by Mr. Ainsmith a few moments before. The astute counselor at law then took the floor.

"I have come, sir," he lectured the manager pompously, "to protect the interests of this gentleman but yesterday having attained his majority, who, it appears, purchased an automobile of you during the period of his infancy, a fact he confesses was made perfectly plain to you at the time and duly attested by the evidence of my son, an eyewitness to the transaction in question. I have come to insure a legal tender of the return of this property and to demand in the name of my client a full return of the purchase price secured by you from him. I herewith demand the return in cash to him of the sum of one thousand eight hundred and thirty-five dollars."

"You must be crazy!" sneered the manager. "I confirmed the sale of the machine to Mr. Quiller myself, and called up his guardian, who authorized the statements made by him relative to securing the money to pay for it from Mr. Mason himself. Besides, from the looks of the machine, it is hardly the same car he purchased from us some four months ago."

"Quite true, in every particular," smugly conceded the wily attorney. "But I call to your attention that his guardian at the time disclaimed an entire approval of the transaction, as doubtless will be attested by him should it become necessary. I hardly consider any such step likely, however. The Garber Company has probably succeeded in convincing itself thoroughly that the contest of any such claim as that now being made by my client is one not only costly, but entirely fruitless."

"I don't know a thing about that," tartly replied the manager, "but if you want my personal opinion you're welcome to it: You can wait till the Styx freezes over before you get a nickel back from me."

"Without doubt," suavely returned Mr. Ainsmith, "but our demands are made through you only because you are vested with the proper authority to receive them, and no one else. You will probably have occasion to consult with your attorney, as well as with the president of your company. Simply call to their attention, in such an event, that I am thoroughly conversant with their experience as related in the supreme-court reports for the State of Michigan, the one hundred and eighty-third, pages 157 to 167. If you will take the trouble to read the case yourself, you will immediately recognize its peculiar resemblances to the condition of affairs under discussion, as well as recognize the entire futility of any course but the one there forced upon them. Here is my card. I shall expect to hear from you by to-morrow evening at five o'clock."

The three politely bowed themselves out, and, boarding a street car, repaired to the establishment of the jewelry concern from whom Squib had purchased the three-carat diamond four months before. To the manager of this emporium Mr. Ainsmith substantially repeated his conversation with the manager of the automobile concern, after witnessing a tender of the property by Squib.

The manager of this business was

quite as surprised as the previous victim had been, but exhibited a demeanor in marked contrast to that previously experienced by the three.

"It's a pretty slick game, Mr. Ainsmith," he laughed, putting the stone in a case behind him, "but hardly necessary at all. We go on the principle here that the customer is always right. Whatever the facts regarding your client's alleged infancy makes no difference to us. If he wants his money back, he gets it. I might say in passing that we are all the more willing to concede to his wishes in this instance, since diamonds of this quality have become increasingly valuable since the time of his purchase of it. I should say it was worth about fifteen per cent more than when he bought it. Here is a memo of the amount. The cashier will honor it immediately."

The somewhat nonplused attorney took the slip, secured the sixteen hundred and twenty dollars originally paid by Squib, and retired with the two boys.

"That was certainly one on us, boys," he remarked with a certain measure of chagrin. "It's only eleven o'clock, and before calling upon the president of the Home Vista Real Estate Corporation it is borne in upon me that we might do well to take a look at the twenty lots purchased by our friend Quiller. Who knows, they may be worth looking at before rescinding his contract with them."

The three conspirators boarded another street car going north, alighting at the garage of the Fordick Company, where Slicker secured a touring car. The three then drove rapidly what seemed an interminable distance to the northwest part of Detroit, and in the course of three-quarters of an hour arrived at a district literally plastered with real-estate shacks. The Home Vista Subdivision was located with little or no difficulty, as it was surrounded by an activity hardly normal in such surroundings as those the three expected to find.

Entering a real-estate office nearest to the property contracted for by Squib, Mr. Ainsmith inquired:

"What are lots worth in the Home Vista Subdivision?"

"You've got me there, sir," a smiling, red-headed operator replied. "But if you want to know the price they are asking for them I can answer you better. They are getting about forty dollars a foot for the inside lots, and are asking as high as sixty a foot for the lots on Home Vista Avenue. This territory has recently been taken into the city limits, and that gang of wops you see over there is getting ready to run a plug line for the street-car company to connect with the Grand River Avenue line. That makes those lots all business frontage, and, if you ask me, I wouldn't sell them for seventy dollars a foot if they were mine. Why, do you want to buy some?"

"Nope," returned Mr. Ainsmith. "Got some I'd like to sell."

"Oh!" returned the agent in a different tone of voice. "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. If you've got any business-frontage lots I'll take ten of 'em right now for fifty-five dollars a foot and pay you cash for your equity."

"You're on!" shouted Squib. "Write out your check."

"All right; come in," invited the real-estate man.

Nodding his agreement, Mr. Ainsmith entered with the two boys and directed the transfer of ten of Squib's lots to the agent, for which the latter wrote his check for eighten thousand five hundred dollars, one thousand of which represented the amount paid by Squib on the entire twenty lots. The remainder represented a clear profit, the agent having assumed the land contract on the balance due for the five hundred feet he had just purchased.

At the suggestion of the attorney the four men then rode downtown, certified the agent's check, and called with him at the office of the Home Vista Company. The attorney there directed that new contracts be made out to Squib and his purchaser, fearing a possible complication over the minority of Squib at the time of his original purchase.

This being completed satisfactorily,

the agent turned to Squib and announced with an engaging grin:

"I've already got those lots sold for sixty-five dollars a foot, sonny, and I'd like to have an option on the ten more you hold at sixty a foot."

"Suits me," replied the delighted speculater. "I'm no hog. Make all you can."

The option being duly witnessed, Squib announced:

"I'm going out and take back that Garber car. See you two later."

To the manager of the automobile company Squib, by now well versed in duplicity, explained that their previous call had been all a joke, pursuant to a wager entered into between two of them. Having won, he hastened to relieve the man's mind, he said, and from the pitiful expression of relief this announcement occasioned it was clear to be seen that he had certainly succeeded.

"I didn't think you would do a trick like that to me, Mr. Quiller," the Garber agent almost wept. "I just called up my attorney, and he told me I was in up to my neck and not a life preserver in sight. You certainly have taken a big load off of my mind."

With this cheering intelligence to light his path, Squib jumped into the recently deserted Garber, and with small regard for speed limits drove to the Ainsmith residence on Ferry Avenue. To the maid at the door he announced his desire to interview Miss Florence Ainsmith at once, a wish that was gratified without delay.

"Why, what's the matter, Squib?" solicitously inquired that adorable young person. "You are shaking like a young puppy and act scared to death."

"I am, Florence, my dear," he replied. "I'm worse than scared. I'm simply panic-stricken, and you are the only person on earth to alleviate my terrible sufferings. I'm in love—really and honest to goodness—and I just found it out. I want you to marry me, and this is to be no three-carat engagement. I've got my mother's old engagement ring with me. Will you wear it and help me make a real man of myself?"

"You say that very convincingly, Squib," smiled the girl quizzically, "but you mustn't expect me to take you seriously. You're simply having an attack of belated virtue. Just to ease your mind, I'll confess to having been grinding a little ax of my own, along with the rest of you. I suggested to father that he have you buy that diamond at Savage's. Owen Savage has kept me guessing for over two years, and I thought it was about time to force his hand. He's the one who took back the stone, and last night he brought it up here with him. He persuaded me to become Mrs. Savage, so that relieves you of marrying an old woman like me."

"Well, that settles *that*," sighed Squib with a mixture of relief and chagrin.

"Guess I'll toddle along and work up a Red Dog party for to-night. 'Unlucky in love, lucky at cards,' and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Good luck, Squib," returned Florence. "I wish I were young again, too. I'm a good six months older than you. Enjoy your youth, dear boy, and pray for me. My, it must be great to be young!"

Look for the serial beginning in the May 20th POPULAR. It is a wonderful animal story, laid in India:

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A GROUP of prisoners unloaded a car in the navy yard. They were dressed in uniform, but the white tape of the wide collars and at the cuffs was missing, and there were no watch marks, service stripes, or rating badges. Just as the men's dress was without spot or color, so their expressions lacked animation and their movements energy. They toiled slowly, listlessly, as if each step and each heave of the shoulders marked time. Even the armed sentry, who paced lazily up and down in the bright spring sunshine, thinking of next day's liberty, showed more zeal for his job than they.

And yet the work they did counted in a great cause. They were unloading the steel billets for six-inch shells, which, after boring and finishing and loading, would be served out to the fighting ships, whose gun crews would send them searching, each one almost with a prayer, for the hot vitals of the most infamous enemy to peace and decency that the world has yet known. Thus the long line from the rough, uneven castings to the destruction of a submarine was, after all, a line of romance, but the men neither saw it nor felt it; each had his separate self-worthy grievance, and the whole combined to make the group sullen and blind. They were the misfits thrown out as scrap as a great naval machine shifted into high gear for war.

Among them was Lorenzo Ortega. As he bent his lithe body to pick up the hundred pounds of rust-coated steel, the sentry had his eye on him. Twice this man had almost escaped, and the escape of a prisoner meant extra duty and loss of liberty for the sentry.

But Ortega was not thinking of escape that morning. His mood was too despondent for boldness. Rather would he have stood before a firing squad and had an end to it all. With the thought he straightened defiantly. The sentry stopped his pacing, and stood watching, with rifle at ready.

"Cut it!" warned Mike Mahoney in low tones. He stood next to Ortega in the line. "Want to have the whole bunch sore at you? A man can't renig at this stuff unless his friends suffer, too."

Ortega hesitated, then relaxed, and picked up the shell. A queer friendship had been hit off between these two men of opposite type. Mike was a confirmed liberty breaker, a trouble maker, and a roughneck. He had tried out the army, marine corps, and navy, only to be "bobbed" out in each case with a dishonorable discharge and a prison sentence. He was now doing a year for fraudulent enlistment, which might have been overlooked in war time if not linked with insubordination and the beating up of a petty officer.

Lorenzo Ortega was a native Californian, eager, impulsive, temperamental, whose family still owned one of the old Spanish ranchos and whose paternal great-grandfather had been governor of the State. Combined with his Spanish blood there was a strain of Indian, dating from the time of the Mission Fathers, which showed in the olive of his skin, the blackness of his

eyes, and his nervousness under restraint. Without waiting for the draft, he had enlisted, and brought to the service his impulsiveness, his family pride, and his quick temper. This combination had been his undoing. Sent East to a receiving ship, a harassed officer, drilling long hours with many recruits, had mistaken his eagerness for impudence and his dark skin for that of a mulatto, and attempted to haul him bodily from the ranks to make an example. Instead, the tables were turned instantly, the officer was struck down, and Ortega found himself a prisoner at hard labor, so that while other men fought and died gloriously in the protection of ships, in the convoying of troops, and in brushes with the enemy, he was out of it all. Feeling his disgrace so keenly, it was perhaps natural that he turned to Mike Mahoney, who felt it not at all, while Mike turned to the Californian for reasons unaccountable.

"Four years," muttered Lorenzo Ortega through shut teeth, and Mahoney answered the cry for help as the two bent over the truck to deposit their load.

"Maybe not," he comforted, speaking in low tones. "Get busy on these drills that they hand us when we're resting. Some of these days they'll need a bunch of men bad enough to forget a few breaks, and take some of the long-timers away from here. What'd you mean four years? I've done a year before this, and I've seen 'em with ten get restored to duty before me."

Yet most of what Mike said was sheer bluff to keep up the other's spirits, for striking a commissioned officer was worse than Mike had ever done, and in the service the hardest to forgive.

"My father has written to the congressman," confided Ortega. "He wishes to explain."

"Back him up by being good then," advised Mike. "Cheer up a little. Soft pedal the grouch."

"Pipe down, you two!" ordered the sentry, coming suddenly to life as a young officer came down the path toward them. The sentry came stiffly to attention and saluted for his detail. The working party of prisoners continued their tasks. It argued ill for parole or for the shortening of sentence if a prisoner were caught loafing at his job, and each of the men worked a little brisker as the officer passed.

A place as an officer was something Ortega had dreamed of. Hungrily he took in every detail of the other's uniform, from the creased trousers with the black ribbon stripe to the anchor and single gold bar on the collar of the close-fitting service coat. Then his eyes rested for an instant on the lieutenant's face. With a start which his race and training made almost imperceptible, he bent quickly over to pick up a shell and hide his own identity. He had recognized the man. Shame was his first emotion; shame that one he knew should find him disgraced, coupled with a warm pleasure that at last he had seen a familiar face, and then, as he gazed at the officer's retreating back, wondering what was best to do about it.

"Get to work," warned Mike. "I've known 'em to turn around and bawl a fellow out, and this guy looks like he could do it."

"I know him," volunteered Ortega. "He was on a ship which came to the port where I live."

"Know his name?" asked Mike.

Ortega looked at him, surprised. "Certainly," he said. "We entertained him in our home for three days. I took him hunting, fishing. Perhaps I should have made myself known to him. But I——" He hesitated with flushed face.

"You did right to lay off that stuff," said Mike scornfully. "These birds are so hedged around with regulations that they couldn't make it easier on their own brothers. If you know a common sentry, it's different. You didn't tell me this fellow's name yet."

"Carl Wohler," said Ortega, and with the name came a realization of the man's nationality and what he had been doing when he saw him last.

"A squarehead," said Mike significantly. "I thought so from his looks. How did you come to know him?"

"He was a passenger on one of the coast boats making a trip through the canal. He had letters from business friends in the East," said Ortega thoughtfully.

"You want to keep out of this thing," advised Mike. "It's just like I told you. Make out you didn't see this guy. He's one of the new ones just appointed, and he won't be happy to have friends among a gang of prisoners."

But the Californian had kept something back from Mike. He was not quite sure of his man. Wohler had told the Ortegas that he was an officer in the German navy, and the letters were from German bean importers. Free of Mike's opinion and influence, he wanted to think out the problem of how the same man could now be serving as an ensign in the United States navy. Was it possible that he was mistaken and that a mere resemblance of faces had tricked him? He had known Wohler as a civilian, and this man was in uniform.

When the bugle called retreat from the day's work, and the working parties had gathered in the old wooden ship which housed them, Ortega had still told Mike nothing more, and had made no decision as to what he should do. The talk of spies and their work was insistent. Underground news of thwarted attempts to blow up the navy-yard arsenal, destroy the lathes which turned the shells, and set fire to the storage tanks of oil for the destroyers was handed about from man to man. Most of it was wildest exaggeration, little was possible to verify, and yet all had its psychological effect.

Ortega was intensely loyal. He had resigned from the agricultural college at Berkeley to join the navy, with the full consent and approval of his family. To tell what he knew about the German seemed the sensible thing to do. And yet his position of disgrace, his fear of ridicule and further shame, and the advice of Mike to keep hands off made him hesitate. It was even possible, he told himself, that this was Wohler, naturalized and serving his adopted country. The letter from the congressman made it plain that the only way to get a reduction of sentence was by being a model prisoner, and the long four years seemed to stretch out endlessly in days of monotonous toil. Yet, desperate with inaction and rebelling against the thought that he must do nothing to hurt his chance of parole, Ortega decided to risk further punishment for himself and make sure that the German was not a spy.

Through the proper channels an interview was obtained with the commandant. Even this was not possible without first a great deal of insistence to the master at arms, who in turn took it up with the captain of the *Santee,* who referred it with a mass of other rumors and hearsay to the busy commandant of the navy yard.

Thus it was that when Ortega appeared his story had been stripped of all vitality and remained one simple line on a card: "Prisoner Lorenzo Ortega claims he identifies Ensign William Enright as German officer."

The commandant listened to Ortega's story a little impatiently. Mistaken identity was so easy, and the Californian was disturbed and nervous. At the first pause he touched a bell on his desk, and held up his hand for silence. Immediately the accused officer stepped briskly into the room, saluted the commandant, and turned a half-amused, half-sneering glance at Ortega. Face to face, Ortega started forward eagerly. He was sure now that this man was Carl Wohler.

The commandant checked him and addressed the officer: "Mr. Enright, this is, of course, a mere matter of form, but this man claims that he knew you in California and that you were then an officer in the German navy."

"I have never seen this man before, sir, and the navy department has my family history and full record," Enright answered calmly.

Ortega felt suddenly as if he were on trial instead of Enright, which, indeed, he had been from the beginning. With his close-cut hair, torn, patched clothing, and excited manner, he suf-

fered in comparison with the well-dressed, self-assured officer, full of righteous indignation, who now turned to him angrily.

"This fellow is serving four years for striking an officer," he taunted. "You will excuse my impatience, sir, but it is plain to be seen he thought to make favor by his wild story."

Ortega's face flamed. He was doubly sure, after hearing Enright speak, that the man was Carl Wohler. Momentarily he lost complete control of himself. "You lie!" he cried. "You are Carl Wohler!"

The German struck him quickly across the mouth with his open hand, a typical Old World gesture, and as the marine sentries stopped Ortega's tigerish leap at his throat turned to the commandant. "These yellow half-breeds won't do to trust, sir," he said passionately, so that Ortega heard. "I beg your forgiveness for losing my temper."

The commandant dismissed him cordially, had the struggling Ortega taken away, and turned to the next business in hand.

For this indiscretion Ortega was given five days' solitary confinement on reduced rations, and had another mark added to his already black record, but came back to the working party with a new emotion and a new incentive, and, with something to work for, grew more interested in the life about him, caught something of the spirit of the rough shells which were fed into finishing rooms, of the ditches which were dug for electrical-signaling devices, of the ships which came in to be docked, and began to feel that, after all, he was playing a minor, humble part in the great game of war.

"You're doing better," approved Mike. "A man can only do so much, and somebody has got to polish the pick handles and scour the shovels. The brig seems to have wiped out that want-to-die idea you had so long. What's the matter with you?"

"Enright," said Ortega, and Mike caught the hatred with which the single word was charged.

"Don't do anything rash," Mike warned. "Why don't you keep on being good for a few minutes more?"

Ortega smiled grimly. Enright was a spy, had struck him, despised, and reviled him. "I will make him pay," he told Mike, and his tone carried a savage positiveness before which the Irishman whistled.

"You'd better think it over," he offered. "One round between the gold stripes and a flatfoot is usually enough."

"I have," retorted Ortega. "The man is an impostor. I will be careful, as you say, but I will not give up."

Instinctively Mike realized that this mood was full of danger for an enemy, and he dropped the subject, knowing that anything he could say now would be unavailing.

Only occasionally Ortega saw Lieutenant William Enright, whom he knew as Carl Wohler, and nothing suspicious marked the lieutenant's activities. On the contrary, the navy yard became singularly free from unaccountable accidents, and its whole machinery went forward with increasing vigor. What little doubt the commandant had formed by the evident sincerity of Ortega's accusation was dissipated. He had noted the faintly German accent to Enright's salutes and the slap instead of a blow. But the man's history was above reproach. He had been born on the Great Lakes of German parentage, had been an officer in the naval reserve, and on the outbreak of hostilities had taken the examination for ensign and been sent East to take up his duties at the navy yard. The record was clear and convincing. The commandant also received additional information in regard to Ortega, and, convinced of his sincerity, made a note to recommend a reduction of sentence, if he continued to make a good prisoner.

The destroyers interested Ortega most of all. It was on a destroyer that he had hoped for service. A fleet of them drilled in maneuvers every day, returning to the navy yard at night, and Ortega always carried his supper to the deck of the *Santee* to watch them come gliding in and snuggle up against their

berths like a flock of swift pigeons settling to roost. Then up from below would come the men, smoky, grimed, splattered, recounting the day's exploits as they drew fresh water from the docks to wash up, and soon after most of the men and officers would hurry out the navy-yard gates or be rowed over to the receiving ship.

Finding that Ortega could handle an oar, he and Mike Mahoney were detailed in an extra dinghy crew to make trips between the navy yard and the receiving ship. They were called on often when the destroyer fleet came in. Mike complained of the added burden to the day's work, but Ortega was quite willing to add this slight strain to his tired muscles in exchange for scraps of conversation overheard—the trial runs of the torpedoes, the breaking of a record score by a gun pointer, the close shave from collision as a steering gear jammed. All this was wine to his flagging spirits, and the nights that he missed a trip were followed by dull days.

Through Mike, Ortega began to learn something of the life aboard the destroyers. Every strange expression and term that he heard he asked questions about, and if Mahoney did not know passed it on to others.

"The code book?" he asked one night after the dinghy crew had returned from a trip.

"It's one thing a gob don't have to worry his head over," said Mike. "It's the captain's little sleep taker."

"But what's it like?" persisted Ortega. "How big is it, and what's it for? And why do they speak of it with so much awe?"

And then Mike told him of the priceless secrets of fleet maneuvers, fire control, steering orders, rescue, battle, and retreat, and how the book was kept locked in a safe aboard the ship and guarded from falling into the hands of an enemy by having sheets of lead made fast to the leather binding. "If a ship is about to be captured," said Mike, "they throw it overboard and the lead sinks it. The fellow that lugs one of 'em around is just about as careful about losing it as he is about drinking a dose of cyanide."

"I see," said Ortega soberly.

"Everything's in it," continued Mike, "from the 'uniform of the day' to 'smallpox aboard, keep clear,' besides the key to ciphers and a lot of other stuff that an enemy would laugh for the rest of his life to get."

"Do destroyers have them?" asked Ortega.

"Sure," said Mike, "and they've just added a lot of new submarine stuff."

Ortega was silent, his mind taking a new turn, and Mike took advantage of the break in the questions to go below, leaving the Californian to wonder why a prize as rich as the code book had not attracted Enright.

The German was attached to a ship being fitted as a submarine tender, and the work of rearranging the vessel's equipment kept him closely aboard. Ortega knew that he went out of the navy yard every day for lunch and the exact hour of his leaving and return, as well as what time in the evening he left the navy yard to go across the river to the receiving ship, but so far he had not seen him around the destroyers. Watching as closely as his limited liberty permitted, and urged on by a certain knowledge in his own mind that Enright was a spy, Ortega could find nothing in the other's actions which was suspicious. Being confined below at night, he could not know that the German was very friendly with the destroyers' officers when off duty and that he frequently came back across the river to visit them.

At the end of the week nothing had developed, and Ortega stood on deck, leaving his supper untasted to see the destroyers come in. They were a little early, and each commander vied with the other to get secured. Swiftly they settled one at a time, and by twos, with a whir of reversed screws, and Ortega waited hopefully for the summons which would call out the dinghy. The destroyers' crews would be full of the week's work to-night, and he needed cheering.

But the dinghy was not used. Grad-

ually the boats became silent, the voices of the scattering men farther away. Even the time for a belated officer or two passed, and gloomily Ortega started below.

Pausing at the hatchway for one more look backward at the slim, dark outlines he was beginning to love, Ortega stiffened instantly, every sense alert. A familiar figure, one whose every move and gesture he knew perfectly, was passing under the electric light on the dock to which the flagship of the destroyer fleet was tied. With provoking confidence, after returning the sentry's salute, Ensign Enright stepped on the destroyer's deck, and with an ease of manner which made Ortega clench his hands, walked unhurriedly aft to disappear down the ladder.

Ortega hurried to the rail to watch. He knew that Enright, as an officer, could come and go as he pleased, but that also he had no real business aboard the destroyer. Something in the cocksureness of the man's bearing set his nerves tingling. He leaned over the side in his eagerness.

"Get below, you!" ordered the marine sentry. "What do you mean, hugging the rail? First thing I know you'll be overboard and gone."

Ortega stepped back. The harsh tones sent a wave of anger over him, but he was getting used to that, and the sentry's mention of escape overboard thrilled him with its possibilities. Ortega was a crack swimmer. The two hundred yards by water from the *Santee* to the destroyer presented a small barrier to the winner of many long and short races, and he determined to see what Enright was about aboard the destroyer.

Going below, he answered the muster, hurriedly swung his hammock, and threw off his outer clothing. Then, listening to the tramp of the sentry overhead, he waited until the steps were farthest away, slipped up the ladder, and darted across the deck as swiftly as a lean ghost. With a glance to see if the sentry's back was still turned, he climbed nimbly to the sill of a gun port and slid feet first over the side into the water with hardly a splash.

Since seeing Enright a bare ten minutes had elapsed, and with swift, silent strokes Ortega swam down the *Santee's* side and headed for the destroyer. Keeping in the shadow of the docks and boats, he made the two hundred yards without being detected, and, with his bare feet on the destroyer's sea ladder and his head level with her decks, took a look around. The anchor watch was just going forward, and when out of sight Ortega crawled aboard and hid amidships, behind a group of ventilators.

Nothing seemed amiss aboard the destroyer. Through the glazed deadeye a light was burning in the captain's quarters, and from the fireroom the slow hiss of steam and the throb of the pumps was punctuated by an occasional word or low laugh from the men on duty. The anchor watch yawned as he passed on the other side. And then Ortega crouched lower, for a door opened and closed below, and steps rang on the iron ladder. A man was coming up the hatchway which led from the cabin. As his head and shoulders appeared he recognized Enright, and at the same moment the German spoke.

"Anchor watch," he called softly, and the sentry turned and came to him. "Captain Morse will stay aboard," he continued in a low tone, "and does not want to be disturbed. You are to take the dinghy and put me aboard the receiving ship."

The sailor went to the stern, untied the small boat, and started to haul it up the gangway. "Never mind that," said Enright, who had followed him. "Bear a hand; I'll climb in over the stern." He carried a small hand bag, which he handed down carefully before he climbed over himself.

The whole proceeding had borne the stamp of regularity and order, but to Ortega's supersensitive distrust the one evidence of hurry on Enright's part had been enough. He was determined to see the thing out, and as the boat pulled away he slipped into the water again and followed. Just what he meant to

do was not clear to him, but his hatred of the man and his confidence that he was an impostor made him keep on.

The one man at the oars made enough splash and little enough speed so that the Californian was able to keep up comfortably. Enright had his back to him, steering, and by tuning his long, even strokes to the noise of the oars Ortega kept within a few yards without being observed.

So far Enright had given no further orders to the anchor watch who was rowing for him, but now he spoke. Ortega heard easily. "Put some strength into it," he said sharply. The man increased his efforts, but a moment later he protested civilly: "You're steering downstream, sir, away from the guardo."

"Shut up!" said Enright, and the man was silent; but, sure that the officer was wrong, he began to steer the boat toward the receiving ship by pulling harder on one oar than on the other.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Enright with angry impatience, and, as the oarsman started a mumbled protest, jumped upright from his seat and struck him over the head with the tiller. Half dazed, the man dropped the oars and stumbled to his feet. Swiftly Enright struck again, this time with the butt of his automatic, and the sailor reeled backward, falling over the boat's side into the water. Quickly securing the trailing oars, Enright shipped them, and began to pull hurriedly toward the mouth of the river, away from the receiving ship, and leaving the sailor to drown or swim out as best he could.

Ortega spurted forward as the two men struggled, and, as the boat lost its headway, took hold of the stern. He had not been seen, and was sure now that Enright was trying to get away, but for what purpose he had not yet determined. As the boat gathered speed under Enright's strong strokes, he held on grimly, letting his body trail out behind as he recovered his breath. He was afraid that Enright had the code book, stolen in some unaccountable manner, and he wondered what he could do about it, unarmed, and, being half naked, unable to follow, once a landing was made. He felt sure, after what had happened to the anchor watch, that the German would shoot the second he discovered him alongside the boat.

They were now a considerable distance away from the receiving ship, and Ortega, alarmed lest he lose his quarry as the shore landing grew nearer, was weighing the chances of springing up over the stern in a surprise attack delivered before Enright could drop the oars and get his automatic in action, when the other answered his problem by stopping the boat. It had evidently been many months since Lieutenant William Enright had pulled a pair of oars, and, since he was rowing with his back down the river, he stopped to look around and get his bearings, and at the same time draw his breath.

This was Ortega's opportunity. As the dinghy lost way he filled his lungs with air, went under water, and, feeling softly along the smooth bottom of the boat, found the drain plug and pushed it in. Enright heard the ominous flop as the plug came out into the boat, and turned around from his observation of the shore line with a muttered exclamation of dismay. As yet he had no thought of the presence of an enemy. Lighting a match, he searched in the boat for the precious plug. Ortega was watching. After pushing out the plug, he had dived a few yards to the side and come to the surface away from the boat, for fear he would bump it with his head as he arose.

Wohler wasted half a dozen matches in a fruitless endeavor to find the plug; then, picking up the satchel, he put it on the thwart beside him. Ortega heard him hastily unlatch it and take something out. Then, by the light of another match, keeping his foot over the miniature fountain welling up from the bottom of the boat, the German picked up the compact, oblong object which he had taken from the hand bag and began to rip something loose from it. From Mike's description, Ortega knew it to be the code book, and that the German was taking out the lead

weights. He worked hastily, muttering curses as the water rose over his feet, and then, laying the book on the thwart beside him, sure now that his prize would not sink if he were compelled to take to the water, he began again his search for the lost plug.

With a match held in cupped hands, the German gave a grunt of satisfaction. The water had now risen above the ribs and bottom planking of the boat, and he had discovered the plug floating on the surface. Seizing it, he bent over quickly to put it in place.

Ortega, silently treading water, had seen and heard. He came swiftly alongside. It was no time for craft or scheming. Only desperate, determined attack remained.

Enright looked up, startled, as the boat rocked. He had not succeeded in placing the plug. The nature of the attack puzzled him. He had not been followed by a boat, and that any one should swim after him seemed inconceivable. His first thought was that the boat had struck driftwood, but the dark bulk of Ortega's head and shoulders clambering in over the quarter banished that idea. The Californian had thrust a leg over the rail and was pulling himself aboard. The German snatched out his automatic and fired, but his aim was bad, for he had been half blinded by a vicious slap across his eyes. Ortega had ripped out the sleeve of his undershirt, wadded it into a ball, and, at the German's move to draw his pistol, had thrown the wet, soggy mass with all his strength. The German fired again as Ortega leaped upon him, but the Californian's rush from the stern sheets came so suddenly, and the blow from the wet rag had been so unexpected, that he missed again, and Ortega was able to get hold of the pistol and push it aside before he could fire again. But the German was much larger and heavier than Ortega, and he recovered quickly from the temporary advantage of the Californian's rush. Putting forth all his strength, he sought to break the smaller man's hold on the revolver, knowing that, once he could put an end to this single enemy, his chances were still good for escape, but Ortega fought with a fury which the German found hard to master. The impostor's attempt to escape with the code book, his insult and blow, even Ortega's pent-up hatred of confinement, found expression in this fierce struggle.

"I'll get you!" he cried, and, recognizing the voice, Enright knew at last whom he fought.

"So it's you!" he exclaimed with a trace of relief. "Trying to escape from the prison ship!"

The navy-yard alarm bell had begun to ring, and lights were moving hurriedly around the water front. There was a bare possibility that the search was on for Ortega and not for him, for he could not know that one of the junior officers of the destroyers' flagship, returning to his ship for a heavy coat, had found his commander bound and gagged beside the open safe, and yet he felt sure that no such general alarm would have been given for a single unimportant prisoner. An idea came to him, and he ceased struggling. "Get in and bail," he offered. "We'll get out of this together."

Ortega's hand gave a swift wrench at the pistol, which almost secured it, and, seeing it was hopeless to try to bribe the infuriated Californian, the German settled once more into a sterner effort to dispose of his antagonist. Bringing his knee up sharply, he thrust it wickedly into the pit of Ortega's stomach, at the same moment letting go of the pistol and smashing forward in the dark with his fist. Sick with pain from the first blow, Ortega caught the full force of the second, and slumped down helplessly at the German's feet, who, carried forward by the impetus of the blow, stumbled over him and fell across the side of the boat into the water. Scrambling back, he secured the automatic from Ortega's limp fingers, and felt for the code book and plug where he had left them on the thwart. The book was safe, but the plug was gone, having rolled into the water again as the two men fought. Also, in his hurried efforts to get back

aboard, Enright had submerged the rail of the leaking boat until it was almost full of water. There was nothing left but to swim for it, and the glimmering lights of the city landing and safety were invitingly close.

Ortega still lay across the stern, and as Enright picked up the code book and tied it around his neck, he pushed Ortega's body from this small support into the river. Then, the book secure, he kicked off his shoes, slid out of his coat, and commenced to swim toward shore.

The German was a good swimmer, and the pursuit from the navy yard was getting started. He felt that, after all, a lone swimmer might have a better chance under these circumstances than a man in a boat, especially if there had been a warning telephoned to the docks. With this thought, he turned aside, making for a ruined and unused boat landing just outside the navy-yard gates, and much closer than his first objective.

Ortega had begun to regain consciousness as he lay inert across the boat, and Enright's attempt to drown him proved a bad move for the German. As he rolled into the water he revived sufficiently to sink down and come up on the other side of the boat, where he hung on, unobserved, until Enright started swimming. Letting the German get a slight lead, he was then able to follow slowly, letting his full strength return as he swam after him, using a restful stroke, which kept the distance without increasing it. When Enright turned, he decreased the distance; then, seeing what the German meant to do, he spurted forward with a powerful overhand to attack again.

Had Enright known it, the Californian was now more dangerous than at any time during the pursuit. The water was his element, and he came on with sure, deadly purpose. He had been buffeted, thwarted, despised, but from the beginning his one thought had been that the German must not escape with the code book. What he had gone through made him only the more dogged and persistent.

Enright heard him coming, and turned, treading water, automatic ready, anxious to finish the fight in the quickest way. Ortega dived, swept downward to the German's legs, and jerked him under the water, whirling out of reach of the plunging arms as they sought to grapple. Ortega's head was out of the water, and every sense alert when the spluttering German came up, the automatic pistol held in his right hand. As he fired, Ortega ducked, and the bullet struck the water harmlessly a foot from where his head had been. Circling slowly, the German watched for the Californian's appearance, but with only the starlight Ortega was able to get a breath and go down again while the German still waited. Again came the vicious tug at Enright's legs, and this time Ortega snatched at the code book as well. Again the German wasted a shot as he came to the surface, and again Ortega dodged under the water in time.

After this shot, Enright began to swim toward shore again. He had begun to put a different value on the finished expertness and superiority of the Californian in the water, and concluded that his main purpose was to get away.

Ortega knew there were two more shots in the automatic, and by diving to one side and coming up noiselessly, and then tossing the other sleeve of his undershirt a few yards away so that it made a splash, he made Enright waste one of them, while once more he pulled him under water and made an ineffectual attempt to get the book.

The end of the rotting pier loomed directly ahead of them, and, seeing it, Enright redoubled his efforts, and Ortega closed in. As the German turned to repel the attack, Ortega used a waterman's trick. Cupping his hands and striking parallel with the water, he hurled sheets of spray into the other's face. Into the midst of this blinding volley the German fired the last shot from his automatic just as Ortega gripped the code book, broke the string, and dived away.

The German's bullet had been luckier than the preceding ones. Striking the

Californian's extended left arm, it continued to the shoulder, paralyzing the muscles. Ortega dropped the book, recovered it, and then, with his teeth fixed in the strong leather cover, he started back across the river toward the navy yard. Behind him came Enright, free of pistol and book, swimming rapidly with heavy, splashing strokes. Despite his best efforts, Ortega heard him gaining, while the numbness from his shoulder crept down his left side to impair the efficiency of the leg stroke. The distance across the river seemed endless. The lights on the other side gleamed at him mockingly. To come so near success and then fail seemed intolerable. Enright's panting breaths as he lunged through the water were almost at his heels, and to rest he dived sideways. When he came up, with his senses numbed, he no longer heard his pursuer, and a new terror gripped him that the next second, or the next, he would feel the German's hands on him. But he kept on and on stubbornly, savagely, until his brain ceased to function, and the strokes came mechanically, and, after almost an age, bumped into a low sea wall, clambered up, rolled shoreward, and lost consciousness.

An hour later, Captain Faulkner, of the *Santee*, the commandant of the navy yard, and the fleet commander from whom the code book had been taken were cross-questioning the captured German officer. Halfway across the river in pursuit of Ortega, an approaching launch had sent him hurrying back to personal safety in flight without the prize he had attempted to get. His great splashes made his detection easy, while Ortega was unseen.

Commander Faulkner, of the *Santee*, broke the silence. "One of my prisoners escaped at about the same time," he said. "The same one who made a complaint against this man. I wonder if the two had any connection."

A disturbance outside the door interrupted him. A sentry appeared. "There's a half-naked man out here," he announced. "All bloody and seems out of his head. He's got a bundle tucked inside his undershirt that he wants to give to the commandant."

"Bring him in!" cried the three officers, and, supported by the sentry, Ortega stumbled across the room, felt inside his undershirt, and laid the code book on the table. The German laughed as the three officers hurried forward to make sure that nothing was wrong with the miracle.

"Where did you get this?" demanded the commandant. Ortega was too far gone for reply. He pointed at the German, lurched forward, and fell.

"Get some blankets! A stretcher! Hurry this man to the hospital!" ordered the commandant, a scant realization of what had happened coming to him. Then he faced Enright. "So this is why you failed?" he said.

"Yes," said the German, "if it hadn't been for this yellow water rat I'd have made it."

The commandant checked him angrily. "Cut that!" he said tersely. "You made that stick once, but not again."

The German shrugged. "As you will," he said, and then, yielding suddenly, he told the whole story of how he had taken another man's name, family history, and diploma to masquerade as William Enright, and how he had watched for weeks to find the fleet officer alone in the cabin with the safe open, and finally how Ortega had followed and fought him. When he had finished he asked for a cigarette, and lighted it with steady fingers.

"I recommend that we clear Ortega's record and restore him to duty," said Captain Faulkner.

"Yes," interrupted the German, smiling sarcastically, "I would do that. *My* reward, if successful, would have been a captaincy. Instead——"

The Diplomacy of Captain Kurio

By Herbert Slocombe

Poe once wrote about three Sundays in a week, but one Sunday was enough for the passengers of the *Mongolia*, and many of them would have been glad to skip even that

THE last voyage of the transpacific liner *Mongolia* under the magic régime of its diplomatic commander, Captain Hirio Kurio, will be remembered by its two thousand passengers and crew as the most alarming and momentous trip within the compass of their individual memories. To the grizzled, imperturbable Japanese captain it was *the* trip; the culmination of forty long years of service crossing and recrossing the Pacific, like the shuttle of a great machine. But what award of recognition its successful conclusion a fortnight hence would bring, that depended upon the board of directors sitting in their paper-partitioned offices at the far-away port of Yokohama.

The *Mongolia* cleared the lower bay and issued through the Golden Gate at high noon on Friday, August 14, 1914. On Saturday night, the second day from port, the first untoward incident occurred. It was shortly after the closing of the dining saloon that the captain received a petition signed by nearly two hundred passengers praying that the wide-open gambling tables in the smoking room be closed tight the whole of the following day, the first Sunday at sea. The petition was drawn by the leader of a missionary delegation, some twenty in number, who occupied a block of second-class cabins on the upper starboard deck.

The grizzled little captain's eyes shone fire as he unfolded the long document and apprised the names and identities of the leading signatures to that extraordinary request. In all his years at sea, never had that question before risen above an isolated outspoken individual denunciation by some crank theologian, missionary, or woman reformer; but here before him lay a well-rounded petition with the signatures of several first-class passengers and influential merchants.

With the prompt dispatch of an old campaigner, Captain Kurio immediately transmitted a note to the Reverend Talcott Williams stating that because of the shortness of time it would be impossible to take action on the honorable petition which he had only at that late hour received through the hands of his second officer.

Thus dismissing for the moment the threatened curtailment of at least a large number of his patrons' daily recreation, the little captain paced about his cabin with closely contracted brows and visage set. This was the closing trip of his forty years at sea—would it also raise an unsolvable problem? Would the missionaries aboard redouble their efforts at this affront? Were the years of his tranquil administration of his honored company's affairs to end thus, in turmoil? If clamoring counter petitions should be presented for the following Sunday, how could he appease both factions? Could he reasonably look forward to the commodoreship of the fleet as a reward for his long years of faithful service if he could not peacefully govern one of its units?

When the chief steward brought the news of the threatened curtailment of their liberties to the patrons of the crowded smoking room, and of their captain's master stroke in immediately dismissing the missionaries' petition be-

cause of the shortness of time, there followed great cheering and wild demonstrations in honor of the ship's diplomatic old captain.

"But, excellencies!" continued the astute second officer, raising his hand for silence as the hubbub subsided. "It is only through my captain's graciousness that we will be permitted to assemble in this room to-morrow—at the risk of incurring great dissatisfaction from many aboard. For to-morrow, at least, we are safe; but as for the following Sunday, a week hence, of that, excellencies, I cannot foretell."

"We won't stand for any missionary dictation!" shouted Bill Garvin, an oil salesman and old patron of many voyages on the Pacific & Orient's steamers. "Our transportation calls for unrestricted concourse throughout the public rooms aboard ship—and we won't stand for any infringement of those rights!"

"No restrictions! Inform your captain, officer, that we'll not stand for any restrictions!" voiced a dozen hoarse-throated players in unison.

"If the missionaries want to pray, let 'em pray," injected Ned Tetherington, a young engineer who had just swept in a rich jack pot at a central card table.

"We can petition the captain ourselves," boomed the big bass voice of Dan Toomey, a professional gambler, well known on many Pacific steamers. "We can raise as many votes as they can."

"Excellencies!" protested the diplomatic chief steward, much alarmed. "You have my captain's sympathy, but we must abide by Captain Hirio's decision, for he is a very wise man. Is it not his anniversary trip? On this trip there must be no contentions. That would spoil his untarnished record of forty years!"

The scant patronage of the religious meetings the next day did not dampen the fervor of the Reverend Talcott Williams. On the contrary, he decided that with a full week before him he would prepare such a ponderous petition that the following Sunday would redound to the glory of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, and of himself in particular.

Monday found the ship's wireless operator hard at work, while in front of the bulletin board a great crowd of passengers congregated, reading the ominous news:

> The Japanese government has sent an ultimatum to Germany, to evacuate Kiau-Chau immediately, withdrawing her warships, and turning over all possessions therein to Japan. Germany's reply must be received in Tokyo before noon on Sunday, August 23d.

Speculation immediately ran rife as to what would happen by the following Sunday. Surely it promised to be a momentous week. Little knots of passengers gathered above and below decks, all conversing with much concern on the single topic—their rapidly multiplying danger as the result of that Japanese ultimatum. The bulletin board would then be watched with avidity for further news from either Tokyo or Berlin.

How Bill Garvin and the frequenters of the smoking room were warned in the nick of time of the ingenious workings of the Reverend Talcott Williams and a dozen of his supporters in securing an almost blanket canvass of the *Mongolia's* passenger list for his monster blue-law temperance petition is but a word of the cunning intrigue of the faithful second officer, Mitio.

While Garvin was dressing for luncheon at noon, a knock at his door revealed the grinning face of an Oriental orderly, who merely saluted and said: "Excellency, you will not enter the dining saloon to-day without first stepping into the smoking room, where the chief steward waits to speak to you."

"What is it, kid—the missionaries again?" asked Garvin apprehensively. But the orderly merely withdrew, still grinning; and Bill, on opening the door after him, saw him also tapping at the cabin of the British military attaché, also known as a devotee of the faro table.

The sparsely patronized table-d'hôte dinner in the large dining saloon, where Reverend Talcott Williams maneuvered for public support for his new petition,

was as conspicuous as was the overcrowded buffet tables in the smoking room, which sacred precincts the missionaries failed to invade.

It was Mitio himself who got Garvin's ear that evening as he sat in an open game with five other players.

"Eyewitness report that they have secured six hundred petitioners in spite of all our efforts," informed the excited chief steward. "It will be impossible for my captain to refuse so large a majority, for this time they will not be denied."

"We must organize," retorted Dan, "giving no quarter. We must organize as they did. It's possible to get that many on a counter petition."

"But, excellencies, your cabins are private; we can serve you there. Besides, there is the royal suite, unoccupied. It can be stocked to your liking. There must be no contentions on *this trip;* that would spoil my captain's untarnished record of forty years. A record of unbroken tranquillity, excellencies, under Captain Hirio's command!"

But with grim determination the devotees of the smoking room set about under the leadership of Dan Toomey to canvass the ship's passengers with a counter petition in the name of personal liberty. And so the following evening, when Toomey figured up the long columns of hard-earned names that he and Garvin had won, he counted a total of well over five hundred signatures, with a voluntary good-will offering to the captain of forty-seven hundred dollars.

"It's about done," sighed the big gambler, passing the long sheets across the table to where a group of players sat awaiting his report.

"Forty-seven hundred dollars!" announced Ned Tetherington. "It's a remarkable performance, gentlemen, in twenty-four hours! Why, Toomey," he cried, scanning the long lists, "I don't believe you've signed it yourself!"

"No," was the big card sharp's laconic rejoinder; "nor contributed. But I propose sending the captain up five thousand even money."

"But the balance?" queried Tetherington. "That'll leave three hundred more——"

"I'll tend to that little detail myself," replied Toomey evasively.

And then the smoking room understood how seriously Dan Toomey had taken the Reverend Talcott Williams' challenge.

Late that night a distinct increase in the ship's speed was noted. On Wednesday morning the passengers awoke to find the screws vibrating at an unusual velocity. When questioned, the inscrutable face of Mitio told nothing. He had not really noticed, he said. Probably the chief engineer was trying out all the engines working together. He had known of such tests.

"It's no answer at all," whispered Big Dan to Garvin. "He had a regular poker face when he answered. I was studying him. But mark my words, gentlemen—there's something unusual up."

The increased speed and the intensified vibration amidships, together with the settling war clouds in the near East, were the chief topics of discussion at the breakfast table. No one could conjecture a rational explanation, and all forenoon the decks aft were crowded with disquieted passengers. Glasses were handed around, but still no hostile craft was discernible; yet the liner's funnels continued to belch great volumes of black, gyrating smoke, which fell to the water's edge, where it trailed, smudging the white-spumed wake which the propellers were thrashing out with terrific fury.

At noon the ship's officers assembled on the bridge, while accurate observations were taken. Then they all disappeared within the chart room and were not seen again that day. The wireless, too, was busy, although little news had been posted. The pool of bets on the previous day's run was also conspicuously absent in the smoking room.

After lunch a bulletin appeared which had no bearing on the question uppermost in every mind, but simply added to the gravity of the general war situation. It stated briefly that the Belgian

government had been removed to Antwerp, and that a British army had been landed in France.

Thursday morning brought no relief to the tense situation of the fast-speeding liner. Germany had still failed to answer Japan's ultimatum. And but two whole days remained before its expiration by time limitation. Furthermore, there was no word from Captain Kurio as to the status of the smoking room three days hence.

"It's one good sign," observed Bill Garvin, discussing the protracted delay of the captain's answer, as he sat puffing one of his big black cigars—"it's one good sign, gentlemen, the way our contribution stuck on the bridge."

"Money talks," laughed Tetherington, who was betting wildly after a short run of brilliant play.

"I can understand that," droned Dan, pausing at the deal to moisten his thumb and pocket his winnings. "I can understand the money fetchin' things favorin' us, but what I want to know is why we're being driven across the Pacific at this unheard-of rate? What's the game the captain decided on three hours after receiving our little communication? And what's it got to do with rushing us across the Pacific at this nerve-racking speed? He can't make Nagasaki or Yokohama until long after that ultimatum expires, and he ain't heading south for neutral waters at Honolulu, either!"

"Et ees a war measure, pure and simple," ventured a little Frenchman, sitting opposite. "The captain heemself only knows that riddle."

"Right-o!" joined in Bill. "Leave all navigation affairs to Captain Kurio. It's an open secret that he's expecting the commodoreship of the fleet on his arrival at port, and he's unquestionably making an attempt at some brilliant play that'll bring him through with colors flying."

The tensity of the situation was increased on Friday by the high-speeding turbines below the engine room producing an even greater vibration throughout the trembling liner, while each of the four great funnels were alternately pouring forth dense blasts that trailed off to the horizon. The bulletin board briefly chronicled the fall of the Belgian capital and its occupation by Teuton forces, but both Berlin and Tokyo were ominously silent.

Playing had taken a decidedly feverish turn during the afternoon. Passengers who were ordinarily contented with promenading now sought out the smoking room, where they tippled with liquor or took a fling at the wheel. In the midst of all this excitement the second officer entered and slowly made his way toward the table where Bill Garvin sat opposite his friends, dealing the cards.

"Excellencies!" saluted the Oriental. "Captain Hirio's compliments. My noble captain was overwhelmed with your generosity, and sends the message that his personal wishes always coincide with your own. He further predicts that, although the opposition is pressing, that he does not foresee any curtailment of the personal liberties of his honored patrons of the smoking room on Sunday, the day after to-morrow."

"Then why are we running so fast, Mitio?" interrupted Toomey. "See—we can't even stack our chips! They dance all over the tables. And our beer siphons the minute the cork is popped."

"Of that my honored captain has not spoken, but, knowing your trust in his seamanship, he abides secure in that confidence which you have expressed in him."

"But is there not danger, Mitio? German cruisers about?"

"There are boats everywhere, excellency," replied the little Jap cryptically. "Last night we passed four strange lights to the starboard, headed east, and they all failed to answer our signals. Our lights have been ordered dimmed from to-night on."

"Then we are approaching real danger!" exclaimed Tetherington. "Why doesn't the captain take us into his confidence? We are Americans and demand to know our danger!"

"Excellency," protested the now agitated chief steward, "Captain Hirio is a very wise navigator. Is it not his for-

tieth anniversary when he reaches Yokohama safe? And old men from his village, think you not they wait for his safe return?"

But the crowd, collecting about the ship's officer, demanded a hearing, insistently calling for speech.

Mitio shrank from the excited passengers and turned appealing yellow eyes upon Bill Garvin. "Speak, excellency ! You have sailed with my captain for many years," he cried. "Speak to your countrymen! Oh, it is nothing, I assure you. We are perfectly safe—tell them it is so!"

The hubbub grew louder, while passengers and crew, attracted by the uproar, were entering the long room by many doorways. It was at this juncture that Bill Garvin jumped to the table and held up his hand for quiet.

"Gentlemen! Captain Kurio has sent us his thanks, and expresses his wish that we should not feel disturbed in any way concerning our occupying this room on Sunday next. The main reason for our high speed the captain has not given out, but states that we are to proceed with dimmed lights from to-night on, as a military precaution. This is the last leg of the captain's fortieth continuous year crossing the Pacific. Is not his record sufficient guarantee of our safety? Gentlemen, in the midst of impending dangers from without, and hysteria from within, I propose a vote of confidence and three cheers for Captain Kurio!"

Garvin's speech carried the hour. With the complete abandon of jovial shipmates the smoking room responded, and when the applause subsided glasses commenced to clink merrily again.

Deck stools had to be pressed into service to seat the overflow that crowded the tables and passageways of the smoking room that night.

Saturday morning increased the tensity of the situation aboard the throbbing steamer, on reading that the United States had transmitted to the Japanese government its understanding that no territory annexation with the exception of the port of Kiau-Chau should be taken by Japan.

Alarming rumors were openly voiced in the smoking room after breakfast concerning the boasted success of the missionary preacher to enforce his religious meetings over the head of the diplomatic captain.

"Why, he's even gone so far as to openly brag that the full ship's orchestra is going to play his opening anthem at the morning service!" vouched Tetherington. "And yet you're yapping for this little yellow captain who's taken our money and is covertly working to spring the double cross on us as a last resort to save his own hide!"

"He dare not do that!" thundered Big Dan, rising. "Why, man, he'd never carry another first-class American passenger—except missionaries—as long as he lived. Every fair-minded man would boycott him. His whole line would suffer!"

"Gentlemen!" injected Garvin at this point. "I confess I can't see how the captain's going to save his skin, but I'll say this: In the twelve years I've sailed with him he's never yet come out second best."

"Napoleon met hees Waterloo," laconically spoke the French subaltern sitting opposite Toomey. "All beeg men he fall—some time."

"But this is a deliberate holdup," continued Tetherington, "and we're purposely blinded to the last. It's a Japanese interpretation of what Europeans term diplomacy—a studied evasion of the truth. In plain English, gentlemen, I'd brand it duplicity!"

"It will be a boycott, in either case," offered Dan, moderating, "and the missionary trade is more sure and better organized than free-lance travelers. But Captain Kurio's in for a trade war, or boycott; and that don't spell promotion to commodore of the fleet unless—unless we're attacked by German raiders to-morrow before divine services—and win!"

"Why, we haven't even got a gun mounted aft," expostulated Garvin. "Why, fellows, you're all up in the air. I don't know the answer myself, but I warn you: Give the captain a chance—he's pulled through tighter holes."

It was at this juncture that Mitio appeared and was confronted with the charge.

"Excellency!" retorted the keen officer, taken completely aback at their suspicion. "My captain has spoken. In the twenty years that I have known Captain Hirio, he has yet to state an untruth. I cannot explain hearsay. I only ask your confidence in my captain one day longer."

That had settled Garvin's suspicions, and, after the punctilious chief steward had swung through the glass doors, he informed his companions: "I'm satisfied, gentlemen, the way our money stuck on the bridge Tuesday that we would win the day. But those persistent reports and the crazy way we're speeding along—well, it kinder got me thinking that the old captain might be tempted to slip one over on us like he did the missionaries last Sunday."

Large sums of money changed hands toward the closing hours that night, and Dan Toomey piled up large winnings.

Without, the night was dark, and the decks deserted. Not a light showed as the great liner plowed palpitating on through the inky swells. The tremble of the engines and the crash of broken spume were the only sounds that disturbed the vast ocean's solitude.

As the two friends rose to leave their tables, long after midnight, when Dan himself even had become sated with his unprecedented winnings, they met Tetherington running toward them.

"Something's up!" shouted the young engineer. "The ship's printing presses have been running full blast for upward of an hour behind locked doors! Something is being printed! Instructions, maybe, in case we're torpedoed—else war's declared already!"

"What do the stewards say?" asked Toomey, instantly alert.

"Won't say anything—noncommittal as a row of clams."

"Guess they're just getting out menu cards for Sunday's big feed," suggested Garvin placidly.

"Or special orders of service for tomorrow's Quaker meetings!" retorted Tetherington. "Else why the lockup? I believe it's like the old missionary told Mrs. Tetherington this morning—that it's to be an overwhelming blow to Sunday gambling!"

"He said that?" shouted Dan.

"Told her this morning," reiterated Tetherington.

"Then we'll see what's at the bottom of it—we'll solve Captain Kurio's enigma at once—we'll not be hoodwinked longer!" retorted Dan, leading the way below deck.

An erect, yellow-visaged, immobile officer saluted them as they advanced toward the door of the printing office. Dan boisterously demanded entrance.

"Excellency," answered the unruffled officer, with no trace of emotion visible, "we have orders to allow no one to disturb this office before eight o'clock Sunday morning."

"Pretty slick!" grinned Dan, chagrined at the Oriental's curt reply. "So in the morning the news will be given out; but whether the subject will be lobster salad, apostles' creed, or a declaration of war, I've no guess coming."

"Then here's for the straw," declaimed Tetherington, stopping short in the passageway.

"Take your regular Sunday hangover, old man," advised Bill, also turning to depart. "Happy dreams!"

"Happy nothing!" snapped Dan. "It's a book and four packs for me! Full dress for mine! I'll not turn in till I see sunup. Besides, that Jap ultimatum expires to-night."

Dan Toomey kept his word—also he kept a log of the night's events after this fashion:

Two-thirty, Sunday, a. m. Screw's vibration substantially reduced ten minutes ago. Indications are that we are running normal after four and a half days of excessive speed.

Three-forty a. m. Noises from the printing presses have ceased. Also our speed had slackened abnormally. Not a sound is to be heard. We are probably drifting or under slight headway. Everything indicates danger ahead.

Four-ten a. m. The first pale streaks of dawn. I shut off my lights, opened the screened porthole. All is hazy and calm. Why is Captain Kurio afraid to go ahead in this fog?

Four-fifty-five a. m. Sunup. A clear hori-

zon on all sides. A beautiful Sunday morning! Evidently the issue of the day will be with the missionaries—not with the Germans, so I will turn in for a little sleep.

Four hours later, Bill Garvin, immaculately garbed in his Sunday best, sauntered leisurely through the almost empty dining saloon, where he observed freshly printed cards at every plate. To his surprise, however, he also discerned the Reverend Talcott Williams seating himself at his place near the middle of the great room and frowning with darkened visage at the printed announcement before him.

Bill halted, undecided whether to go ahead or turn and flee. His indecision was abruptly terminated, however; for the missionary preacher suddenly jumped to his feet, gathering up several cards from the table, and came storming down the aisle and flung out of the room. His eyes were averted, and his jaws were clamped.

Taking heart at the missionary's sudden exit, Garvin sauntered to his table and sank languidly to his seat. Picking up one of the undisturbed cards, he settled back into his chair and scanned the bold-faced type of the printed announcement in hand.

It was curiously dated *Monday*, August 24th, and read:

NOTICE TO PASSENGERS.

Captain Kurio, of the Royal Mail Steamship *Mongolia*, begs to announce to his passengers that a state of war has been proclaimed to exist between Japan and Germany as since *Sunday* (noon), August 23d. Appropriate measures have been taken to safeguard the lives of our respected passengers.

His majesty's steamer crossed the one hundred and eightieth meridian, which is also the international date line, at eleven-fifty-five p. m. last night. For this reason it is necessary to drop one day from the calendar on entering the Eastern Hemisphere.

Therefore, I legally pronounce to-day to be *Monday*, August the 24th.

(Signed) CAPTAIN HIRIO KURIO,
H. M. R. M. S. *Mongolia*.

Bill Garvin read with subtle understanding. He leaned back in his chair and shook until his round body rippled with mirth.

"Crossed on the *ninth* day!" exulted Bill jocularly. "Never heard of it being done before in my life! Always skipped the eleventh. *Monday* already, is it? Then the Reverend Talcott can't sing his new cantata! Ha, ha, ha! I see it! And all that superspeeding with dimmed lights was all a farce! Just to rush the ship across the Date Line late Saturday night—so there couldn't be any more Sunday arguments this trip!"

Again the big oil man convulsed inwardly, and out the tail of his eye he caught an answering twinkle from the little Japanese steward moving punctiliously about him.

"And I'm a-betting any money Captain Kurio won't sail East again just a plain 'captain,' when the *Mongolia* returns," he chuckled half aloud, after a third glass of cocktails, "'cause he's sure put the 'dip' in diplomacy this time!"

And Bill Garvin won his bet.

THE OFFICIAL SEA LION

WILLIAM T. CHANTLAND, chief examiner and head of the law department of the Federal Trade Commission in Washington, does not claim to be as eye compelling a picture as Annette Kellermann in a bathing suit, but he holds a swimming record.

When he was representing the department of justice in its investigation of the "Tin-can Trust," he did so much traveling in his frenzied pursuit of evidence and clews that in one summer he went swimming in the Bay of Fundy; at Revere Beach, Boston; Far Rockaway, Long Island; Coney Island; Sea Girt, New Jersey; Atlantic City; Potomac Tidal Basin, Washington, D. C.; Lake Michigan, Chicago; Lake Ellen Wilson, Glacier National Park; Puget Sound, Seattle, and the Catalina Islands off San Diego.

Songs of the Training Camps

(*National Army.*)

By Berton Braley

THE RECRUIT

I USED to wake up with a sticky tongue
And an eye that was dull and red,
And the songs that the early birdies sung
I heard on my way to bed;
But now I jump with the reveille
And my eyes are bright and clear,
And I thank my lucky stars each day
That the government brought me here.

I used to be mean as a hermit crab
Till I'd swallowed my morning drink,
But now that I'm wearing the olive drab
I'm blithe as a bobolink,
For the fresh air thrills through my throat and chest
And I just want to shout and roar,
And life has a savor, a zip, a zest
That I never have known before.

I used to be flabby and soft and white
When I sat at a desk in town,
But since I've been learning the way to fight,
I'm husky and hard and brown;
It took a cocktail to make me eat
The choicest of food, but now
You watch me march to a mess-shack seat
And wade through the army chow.

So I smile a sort of shamefaced smile
When I think how I pled exempt,
And I'm glad that the board saw through my guile
With a glance of cool contempt;
And though I may perish across the seas,
I'll be one of a splendid clan,
For the army's taken a piece of cheese
And made it into a Man!

The Hidden Death

By Denzil C. Lees

At the English garrison in Aden of Araby there was some silent, terrible enemy taking nightly toll of the men. In spite of all vigilance and care, the soldiers continued to die in their beds. It was a mysterious and harrowing problem

THE sun burst through the crater pass which led to Wady Taban and the desert. The jagged crags that topped the black basalt ridge were golden red, touched by the scattered beams of the rising sun. The seaport of Aden awoke to another day of fetid, festering Arab life, and the garrison of the Baladi al-Angris—District of the English—to a sense of impending disaster.

Major General Sir John Andrews, K. C. B., stood at the entrance of his tent and surveyed the encampment of the additional garrison. His shoulders sagged slightly. There was an air of despondency about him which lent the idea of some unseen burden pressing down upon him. But his face was set with that stubborn determination which had brought him before out of many a tight corner. He was waiting the inevitable news. It had come every morning for the past two weeks without fail. He saw that he would not have long to wait as he watched his men streaming from their tents and the old garrison buildings. At last he perceived his orderly hastening toward him. The look of haunting fear on the man's face betrayed the tidings of his mission. But when he came up his face stiffened in the presence of his commanding officer, and he saluted with a jerk.

"Six men of the Shropshires found dead in bed, sir," the orderly said laconically.

"How were they found?" the general inquired in cold, military tones, and not a muscle of his face moved at the dreaded news.

"The same as the others—as they had fallen asleep."

There followed a short silence as the general's eyes traveled toward the sea. He turned again to the orderly.

"Did the gunboat return?" he asked. There was an anxious note in his voice.

"Yes, sir," the orderly replied. "She came back an hour before dawn."

"And the man—was he aboard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then send him to me after breakfast."

The orderly saluted, and turned to leave.

"One minute," snapped the general. "Remember the purport of his coming must be kept a secret, even from the officers of the garrison. Those are my orders."

"Very well, sir," returned the orderly.

As he stepped briskly away he was sincerely hoping that the coming of this man would end the strange death that was taking so many of his comrades away in the night.

Aden of Araby was simply a coaling station for the Indian traffic having relations with the sea only. But of late since the Great War it had become the sentry box between Europe and Asia. Great Britain had sent a large detachment of troops to ward off any attack from Turkey or the easily aroused, contumacious Bedouin Arabs of the desert, who had always been suspicious of the British making further inroads up country. At first there had been some sharp fighting with the Turks until the new kingdom of Arabia became a fact

and understood the policy of the English. The British government, however, still kept a good-sized force at Aden to guard the immense stores of the auxiliary fleet that swept the eastern waters and guarded the Red Sea entrance to the Suez Canal.

Major General Andrews had been in sole command at Aden for the past six months. Things had gone smoothly enough until a fortnight back, when one morning ten English soldiers were found dead in bed, and every morning since the same thing had happened, though the number had varied.

A careful examination of the bodies had been made from time to time by the four army surgeons in the garrison. But not one of them had been able definitely to locate the real cause of the deaths. They disagreed, not knowing whether it was brought about by sun stroke, an Oriental fever, or poisoning. Two of the surgeons, however, agreed on the last cause. But they could not name the poison, its action was so secretive, and yet they were sure that it caused a sudden paralysis and that probably its chief ally was sleep. None of the men who had died showed any strange symptoms or complained in any way the night before their death. The foodstuffs had been carefully examined, and the drinking water tested, but nothing unsual could be found in that direction. A double guard had been stationed about the camp and garrison. It was impossible for any one to enter or leave without the password at the risk of being instantly shot, and no one had been seen lurking about at night.

The affair was a mystery. A horrible, sinister thing that worked on its victims during the hours of sleep. The whole garrison felt a constant terror from this strange, new, unknown enemy. Many of the soldiers had become despondent as the days went by and the records of the deaths were posted up. The weary watching-and-waiting life of the garrison and the secret deaths of their comrades—at which they were not able to strike back—were beginning to tell on their tempers.

Major General Andrews himself was alarmed, although he had not shown it to his subordinates. He sent to the British force in Egypt for a man with a brown skin, a Semite nose, dark eyes, black hair, and a free knowledge of the Arabic language. There were several men in the garrison who could speak Arabic quite fluently, but none who had the appearance of an Arab. The general was convinced that the deaths were caused by some enemy lurking in the Arab quarter of the city, and he wanted to make sure of the right kind of man to tackle the job of solving the mystery. It was after several fruitless attempts on the part of two of his lieutenants that he had been at last compelled to seek aid from Egypt. He knew that he could get the right kind of man from that quarter.

The volley fired to salute the dead at the burial of the six soldiers echoed back from the crater ridge as a man entered Major General Andrews' tent. He was every inch an Arab, swarthy, ragged, and filthy. But he saluted with that short, easy movement of an officer of the British army.

The general looked at the man twice before he spoke. He was seated at a small writing table, making out his weekly report for the war office.

"You have your credentials?" he demanded sternly.

Without a word the man took off his filthy headdress, and out of its folds extracted a small blue envelope, which he handed to the general.

General Andrews tore the envelope, opened out the inclosed paper, and read:

> The bearer, Major Leslie Dewar, of the First Camel Corps, Egyptian army; special interpreter Sudanese expedition, Cambridge University, Sandhurst; service in India and South Africa. With Lord Kitchener on Syrian exploration. Will meet your requirements. (Signed) COMMANDANT.
>
> His majesty's forces in Egypt, Cairo, June 15, 1916.

Major General Andrews looked up at his visitor. For a brief moment the eyes of the two officers met. They were both the eyes of men to whom death brings no fear and who had made dif-

ficulties stepping-stones in their careers. Then the general smiled, and, rising to his feet, extended his hand, and said:

"Welcome, Major Dewar! Gad! You certainly smell like an Arab."

He uttered those words more in a sense of satisfaction at the man's appearance than to insult.

Major Dewar straightened suddenly, then smiled back at the general as he gripped his hand.

"I suppose my messenger told you what I wanted?" went on the general, and then added, as he surveyed the junior officer again: "Or you would not have appeared in that rig?"

Major Dewar nodded in the affirmative. He was studying this man whom he had been called to serve and had met for the first time.

"You have my authority to act as you wish, Major Dewar," the general continued. "We must get to the bottom of this affair as soon as possible, or I shall end my career in disgrace. Let me repeat, you may go to any length—these deaths must stop."

He paused a moment in reflection, then added:

"Is there anything you desire in the way of men or financial aid?"

Major Dewar was a man of few words. Ever since he had left Sandhurst he had been doing things in a silent way. He learned that from "K. of K." The general's messenger to Egypt had given him all necessary information to begin his task.

"A little money, general," he said shortly. "Baksheesh is a wonderful tongue loosener with the Arabs. And also the password for to-night and to-morrow that I may get in and out of the garrison at my leisure. It may take a few days to find out anything, but I will report to-morrow before 'lights out.'"

"I almost doubted my senses," mused the general as he listened to those shuffling, departing footsteps. "The man certainly fills the bill in appearance; let us hope that he will be as successful in the enterprise."

Major Leslie Dewar shambled out of the garrison grounds as soon as he had gotten what he requested, and made his way to the Arab quarter of Aden, where he mingled with the motley throng. It was not the first time he had been out on such a mission, and he loved this kind of work. He had a reputation in the Egyptian army for his expert scouting and spy work among Arabs. The excitement and the mysterious, adventuresome spirit of it appealed to his nature. But he would always rather work in the desert. He reveled in the heat of it and the carefree, nomadic life of the Bedouin Arabs. He had often thought that he would some day attach himself to some Bedouin Arab tribe and live their life for a spell. Sometimes he could hardly believe that he had come from an aristocratic English family. He felt surely there must be some gypsy blood in his veins. But perhaps it was because he had spent most of his life in the East and had become steeped in things Oriental. His father had seen service in India and Egypt.

He wandered about through the narrow, evil-smelling streets in search of the chief coffee shop patronized by Arab visitors to Aden, strangers, and caravan men from the desert. He knew that was the place of Arab gossip and the latest news that filtered down with the caravans from the north and east, where the fighting was going on. At last he found what he was after, and entered the place in a casual, familiar way, with calm but watchful eyes, and squatted down near a group of Arabs. The serving boy brought him a nargile and a cup of thick black coffee. He contented himself with smoking his nargile for a while, listening to the mumbled, spasmodic conversation of the Arabs near him. Then his gaze wandered around the room. The place was half filled with yellow-skinned, brown-skinned, and black-skinned Arabs, most of them lost in nargile dreams. But he always sought the eyes of the men. It was from them that he learned most. Some were dark, keen, and shining, others heavy and slumberous. There were the eyes which glittered with the yellow fires of greed,

and those in which there lay a still fanaticism.

He turned once again to the group near him. One of the Arabs was now occupying himself catching fleas inside his *abeyah*. Dewar was amazed at the man's dexterity and success. He caught one after another in quick succession, and cracked the little insects on his nails. He must have had many years' practice, thought Dewar. That was one Arab art that he himself had not yet acquired, although he had often tried it on some of his trips—had to in self-defense and to while away the time.

Dewar had just started a conversation with one of the Arabs when a tall Yemen Arab came into the place with a stately, dominating carriage. He wore a mustache and a small black beard. There was some hurried whisperings among the group of Arabs near Dewar as the newcomer made his way into their midst and sat down next to him. There followed a lull in the conversation. The group seemed to be waiting expectantly for the Yemen Arab to speak.

Suddenly he spat on the floor and muttered: *"Salaam alaikum.* (Peace be unto you.)" The others replied in chorus, and Dewar joined in: *"Alaikum es salaam.* (And unto you be peace.)"

With that the Yemen Arab started off into a rambling tale of imaginary warfare, and Dewar knew at once that he was one of the famed Arab story-tellers.

At last in his wandering talk from place to place he reached Aden. He stopped a moment, then made some allusions to the British garrison and spat vehemently. His little black eyes glared, and he let out a string of oaths. The group gurgled with delight, and paused their smoking to catch his next remark.

Here was a man with very little love for the English, thought Dewar, and therefore whose acquaintance it would be well to cultivate. So he turned to the Yemen Arab and muttered in Arabic his views about the vile unbelievers. He also bared his left arm, showing a large scar which he had received in the South African campaign, but which he indicated to the Yemen Arab as the cut of an English saber. There followed another string of oaths, and all the Arabs muttered threats of vengeance. The next hour was consumed with discussing the most outlandish schemes to destroy the whole British empire, proposed by the Yemen Arab in his voluble way and acquiesced by Dewar in whining, injured tones.

Dewar left the coffee-shop with a promise to meet the Yemen Arab that evening in the Inn of the Blind Camel at the rising of the moon.

The last rays of the setting sun glittered on the crest of the rocky ridge to the west and north of Aden. The sordid, gloomy streets of the Arab quarter were beginning to take on those black shadows which lend themselves to the stealthy movements of the pariahs of the night who inhabit Arab seaport towns. The gray and yellow dogs of the streets had already begun their nightly quarreling and fighting over the garbage in the gutters as Dewar sought a food stall and bought some dried figs and dark-brown, leathery Arab bread. Many English soldiers were in the streets on their evening leave, passing in and out of the somber shadows of coffee shops. Dewar followed a number into one of the resorts, but he was ejected by a big sergeant with an oath. The move had been an experiment to test his disguise. He smiled with satisfaction at the result, for the sergeant knew him well.

Dewar still wandered through the streets, slinking about like a beggar, but always keeping his eyes and ears open, on the alert for any information. Like a great black mantle night had settled down upon Aden. At last there grew slowly a pale light, which heralded the coming of the moon. It was the signal for him to seek the Inn of the Blind Camel.

He found the Yemen Arab in the outer court of the inn, giving instructions to a boy for the feeding of some camels. He greeted Dewar with the

usual Arabic salutation, and then went on with his instructions. He called to two Arab porters standing near by to unload the beasts.

"Olive oil for the English," sneered the Yemen Arab, and indicated to Dewar, waving his hand toward the camels. Dewar glanced at the animals; then looked more intently. He was puzzled at what he saw. There were six camels in all, and each was ladened with goatskins. But on two of the camels the goatskins were stitched halfway up to the neck. It was those stitched skins that puzzled Dewar. He had an inclination to go over and examine them. But he knew that would arouse suspicion. As he continued to stare at the stitched goatskins the two Arab porters came and took them from the backs of the camels and carried them away. Dewar knew by the ease with which they carried the skins, apart from the fact that they were stitched, that they could not possibly contain olive oil. He knew perfectly well how goatskin bottles were made. He had once watched a bottle maker at his work, and he began to recall the occurrence to verify his speculations.

He remembered the man first killed the goat, cut off its head, then beat the body with a heavy stick, breaking the bones into small pieces, and pulled the contents out through the neck of the skin. He then extracted the bones from the legs, and tied the skin of the legs in knots. That left the body intact. The skin was then cured with pomegranate rinds and dried in the sun. Dewar was absolutely convinced that a stitched skin could never hold any liquid, especially carried on the swinging back of a camel. Now what was in those stitched goatskins, and how could he find out? The two Arab porters had disappeared with them inside the inn. To all intents and purposes he was an Arab. All Arabs, moved slowly; time was of no consequence to them. But on the other hand, another day meant more British soldiers found dead in bed.

"Yet," he reflected, "I may be on the wrong track, after all."

But somehow he had developed an intuition that this Yemen Arab was up to some trickery.

Dewar and the Yemen Arab passed on into the main room of the inn and sat down in a corner for a final smoke before retiring. Dewar ordered coffee and nargile for both, and tossed a gold piece to the serving boy.

The Yemen Arab had been lost in some vagrant reverie, but when he perceived the gold his eyes suddenly snapped, and he stared back at Dewar with an expression of surprise.

A subconscious feeling came to Dewar that he had somehow made a slip and had aroused some vague suspicion in his companion's mind. He felt it had to do with the coin he had thrown so freely. However, he passed the incident off with a remark about the wonders of a long knife in the dark, an English officer, and his gold. The Yemen Arab's eyes lighted up with a cunning and ferocious expression of avarice.

As they chatted of a prospective scheme to get more English gold, the proprietor of the inn came to them, led by the serving boy. Gold in his inn was something unusual, and he wanted to see this stranger and free spender of it. Dewar saw that he was a Levantine, and when he began to speak he tried to place the peculiar intonation in his Arabic. The man was dark and bearded. He wore an embroidered kumbaz, which was open at the front, displaying a massive, hairy chest. His eyes narrowed as he gazed at Dewar with a suspicious, searching look.

"Peace and plenty, O father of the house," whined Dewar in Arabic. But the man turned away with a grunt, and motioned to the Yemen Arab, who got up at once and followed him. They both walked to the back of the room. The Levantine was speaking rapidly. A torrent of words that sounded angry, as Arabic words do to those from the Occidental world, issued from his lips; but Dewar could not distinguish their meaning from where he sat.

An hour passed, and still Dewar was

left alone. At last he arose. He had made up his mind to go back to the garrison for the rest of the night and to get certain information there the next day. He passed through the outer court of the inn, and plunged into the moonlit street. A figure glided from out the shadow of a doorway and confronted him. Dewar paused, and felt for his automatic. Then the figure threw off the headdress that partly covered the face, and the sallow features of the Yemen Arab smiled at him, showing his rows of even, white teeth in the moonlight.

A sudden, nervous fear took hold of Dewar, but he kept his control. The air was filled with the acrid odors of the street and the soft, crunching sound that came from the jaws of the feeding camels in the outer court of the inn behind him. Dewar half expected a sudden attack, but no one else appeared.

"Hist!" he breathed in the ear of the Yemen Arab. "The feel of gold is satisfying to the hungry man," and passed on.

But as he went forward he had that subconscious feeling of being followed. But he remembered that one always felt that in Arab towns at night. He never looked back once. He felt that would have been fatal. At last he reached one of the garrison sentries, and was halted abruptly. He had to give the password twice and answer several questions before the guard ere he was allowed to enter the garrison. He went at once to the tent that had been assigned to him, lay down upon the cot, and fell into a forgetful sleep.

The next morning he was awakened by an orderly and told to report to the general at once. When he entered the commandant's tent, Dewar saw that he was nervous and pale. His eyes looked as though he had spent a restless night.

"Well, major?" the general began in a voice full of appeal. "What news have you?"

"Practically nothing as yet, general, but to-night——"

"For God's sake, man," the superior officer broke in, "you must find out something soon or it will be too late. Thirty-two men found dead this morning." The general stopped abruptly. One of his hands clutched at the little table in front of him, while his face showed intense anxiety.

Dewar was somewhat disturbed at the news, but he asked quietly:

"Were the men who were found dead this morning on town leave last night?"

"Yes," snapped the general, with a questioning look on his face. "Why do you ask?"

"Simply for information, sir," replied Dewar calmly, and continued:

"I will do my best to-night, sir. I cannot get back by 'lights out.' I may be kept till midnight or even till dawn."

He paused, and looked directly into the general's eyes.

"There is also a possibility that I may never return," he added grimly.

"I had thought to stop the town leave for a while," said the commanding officer in a suggestive tone.

"I ask that they be allowed to go out to-night as usual," replied Dewar decidedly. "After that, I trust things will be different one way or the other."

"Well, do your best, major," finished the general with a sigh. "I am seemingly helpless; the matter is in your hands."

As Dewar returned to his tent he went over in his mind the events of the afternoon and evening before. There were three things that linked themselves together in his way of thinking—the Yemen Arab, the Levantine, keeper of the Inn of the Blind Camel, and the stitched goatskins. How were they connected? What was the result of that connection, and had it anything to do with the secret deaths? That was his problem, he felt, which he made up his mind that he would solve in some way that very night.

The first thing, he reflected, was to find a man who had gone with any of the men who had died, what coffee shops they had visited, and any other resorts for that matter. He was not long in learning what he wanted, and he smiled to himself in a satisfied way when he was told that the so-called

semi-European coffee shop at the back of the Inn of the Blind Camel was the place most frequented by the soldiers of late. Things were beginning to shape themselves according to his speculations, he felt, as he lay down on his cot after the noon meal to snatch a little sleep before dusk fell. He wanted to be fresh for the night's work.

At last the hot, oppressive day declined, and the sun fell over the basalt ridge to the west of Aden.

Dewar left the garrison once again, ragged and dirty, with a bundle under his arm. He bought a camel on the edge of the Arab quarter, mounted it, and started out of the city by the road that led to the crater pass. He was deciding upon his plan of operations as he swung to and fro with the movement of his camel. When he reached the pass he stopped the beast and made it kneel down. He dismounted hurriedly, and changed his clothes in the shadow of a large rock, putting on a Bedouin Arab costume. He then mounted his camel and turned its head toward Aden.

Back in the Arab quarter, he made straight for the Inn of the Blind Camel. He had dismounted from the camel as he entered the city, and led the animal into the outer court of the inn. He made it kneel down with the other beasts that were there, and called to the provender boy to feed it, tossed him a coin, and passed on into the inn with his headdress half covering his face.

His eyes sought the somber shadows of the large room for any sign of the Yemen Arab or the proprietor, but they were not there. A group of Arabs were playing draughts by the light of a little clay lamp; others were smoking in silence, and some were dozing as they squatted on the matting that covered the floor. The place was dimly lighted with a hanging lamp that burned a blue flame.

Dewar sought a place near the tapestry, behind which the Levantine and the Yemen Arab had disappeared the night before. He clapped his hands for a nargile and coffee, and cursed the boy who brought the things; this time gave him the exact price.

For an hour Dewar sat and smoked and sipped his coffee. In the center of the room a brazier sent out a dim glow from its charcoal fire, which was there to supply live coals for the nargiles. The water bubbled in the glass bowl of his nargile. He filled his lungs with the smoke, then let it out in clouds through his nostrils, in the way of the Arabs. He felt oddly at home in the place as he watched the dreamy smokers. A stillness filled the room, broken at intervals by the low murmurs of the draught players and the thin, liquid gurgle of the nargiles. The atmosphere was heavy with the strong smell of the Abyssinian tobacco and the stronger smell of the bodies of the Arabs.

At last he edged toward the tapestry. Then slowly and cautiously he stole behind it, and confronted a heavy door, which he carefully opened. After shutting the door carefully behind him, he felt for his automatic and gripped it by the barrel. He then crept forward into the blackness of what appeared to be a narrow passage, cautiously feeling his way. The passage veered to the right. His heart beat violently in his throat. Suddenly he stopped short. He saw before him the passage opening into a room lighted with hanging lamps. An Arab was leaning against the wall at the end of the passage. His head and shoulders were silhouetted sharply against the lamplight in contrast to the dense blackness of the passage, and Dewar saw that it was the Yemen Arab. A curious smell reached him, like the smell of some rank vegetation of the jungle. He peered beyond the Yemen Arab into the room, but there was no one else there. However, he saw something that made him come to a swift decision. Then he slipped up behind the man and felled him with the butt end of his automatic. The Yemen Arab collapsed in a heap on the floor without uttering a sound.

Dewar's eyes traveled swiftly about the room. Then they fastened on the thing that had attracted his attention

from the passage—a pile of stitched goatskins on the floor by a large divan. He bent down and pressed one of them; it was soft, and yielded to his fingers. He picked it up, opened it at the neck, and plunged his hand into it. He pulled some of its contents out.

"Leaves!" he muttered under his breath as he surveyed a handful in the lamplight. Then he smiled to himself as he realized what they were, and a sense of disappointment smote him. He began to think he was on the wrong track, after all. Then his mind went to the time when he had chewed those leaves himself, out of curiosity and to see the effect. He remembered that they were from a plant called *Kaht*, a product of Arabia, and used extensively by the Yemen Arabs; that the thing acted as a stimulant, effecting the brain and nerve centers—that a man could get drunk on *Kaht*, but——

A sudden thought had come to him as he continued to stare down at the leaves in disgust.

"Could it be possible that these leaves——" he mused.

He put them up to his nose. A curious, musty smell, like the scent of something terribly old, faintly touched his nostrils.

Then he turned sharply. His eyes fastened on a door to his left. It was the sound of singing that had broken in upon his reflections. It was one of those whining, syncopated tunes of the Orient, and his face lighted up with comprehension; it was the song of the Mabraz, the Arab's saloon, or *Kaht*-chewing joint.

Dewar dropped the leaves, and tiptoed across the room to the door, which he cautiously opened an inch or two and peered out.

The rank vegetation smell met him, mingled with the smoke of hashish and kief. The room was nearly full of English soldiers. In the midst of them an Arab dancing girl was entertaining them with the sensuous, snakelike movements of an Oriental dance. Near the dancer, an Arab was singing the weird song that had first attracted Dewar. But it was not the dancer nor the singer that interested Dewar, but the figure of the Levantine, keeper of the Inn of the Blind Camel, and his actions. He held one of the stitched goatskins in his hand. He was giving its contents to the soldiers.

"Those damned English Tommies," thought Dewar. "If they cannot get their beer they must have something else to take its place."

About half of them were chewing the *Kaht* with dreamy, languid expressions on their faces as they watched the movements of the dancing girl.

The Levantine wore a dingy turban and a long kumbaz of a red hue. His dark eyes gravely regarded the soldiers as he passed from one to another. There was something about the man's skin that puzzled Dewar; it appeared to be intensely oiled. Then he saw that the dancer and the Arab chanter were likewise oiled excessively. He tiptoed back to the still form of the Yemen Arab, turned him over, and examined him. He found that he was oiled in the same way and that it was the oil that exuded the rank, vegetation smell.

He returned once more to the door. The singer paused to take a pull at a nargile, then continued his weird chant. But in that pause another sound reached Dewar's ears. His eyes traveled in the direction the sound came. Upward his gaze was set toward the ceiling of the room. He perceived a little cage suspended from a beam. He started with apprehension at what he saw. He had heard that sound once before; it was in Africa. A sudden change of expression came into his face. A hard glitter was in his eyes. A feeling of sickening horror swept over him. It was only a little thing, after all, he thought, but he well knew that that little thing—was a thing of death!

He continued to gaze into the room, trying to decide what to do next, when he suddenly stepped back into the room. The Levantine had emptied his goatskin and was returning for more leaves. Dewar waited for his appearance, holding his automatic in readiness. The door opened halfway, and the Levan-

tine entered the room. He paused when he saw the still form of the Yemen Arab. Then he suddenly perceived Dewar with the leveled automatic. For a brief moment his eyes glared maliciously; then they softened, and he began to speak in a slow, whining voice. But suddenly, as he watched Dewar, a note of recognition came into his eyes, and there followed a terrible expression on his face. His eyes flashed with a fire of some vengeful intention. Dewar had a feeling that another person had entered the room, which accounted for the Levantine's change of expression.

Dewar turned. In that moment the Levantine let out a cry—"Englander schwein!"—and leaped upon Dewar.

The automatic spoke once.

They fell to the floor, the Levantine underneath. In that sudden encounter the two words the Levantine uttered had not passed unnoticed by Dewar and an English sergeant in the next room who had been in France at the outbreak of the Great War. The sound of the shot also brought him quickly to the door, and he peered in with a bulldog expression on his face, and muttered between his teeth:

"Who said Englander schwein?"

Then, as he perceived the struggling forms on the floor, he went forward into the room, his comrades crowding after him.

"What's this, you mangy dogs!" he said gruffly, with a puzzled look on his face. "'Aving a little war all on yer own?"

Dewar glanced swiftly up at the man, and recognized him.

"Give a hand here, Sergeant Hood!" he yelled.

The sergeant ran forward to the struggling, straining forms, muttering: "Who the 'ell——"

With the assistance of two more soldiers, the Levantine and Dewar were separated.

"Let go!" snapped Dewar, jerking away from one of the men. "And send for your commanding officer at once!"

"Well, I'll be damned, if it ain't the Arab major!" mumbled the sergeant in sudden recognition as Dewar took off his headdress to wipe his forehead. Major Dewar smiled back at the man. He remembered that was the name he had gone by among the English Tommies in Egypt long before the present war.

"You made a plucky fight," said Dewar with a sportsmanlike look of appreciation at the Levantine as he perceived the mark his automatic had made in the man's shoulder. But the Levantine only glared back at him.

Dewar was examining some papers he had found on the Levantine when Major General Andrews entered the room.

"Here's the man that is responsible for most of the trouble," said Dewar, indicating the wounded man, who still glared at him ferociously. "And that is his assistant," pointing to the still form of the Yemen Arab.

"I find by these papers," he continued, handing them over to the general, "that this Levantine is an agent of the Turkish government from Constantinople. It appears that the *Kaht* chewing habit has been quite prevalent among the men."

"I have known about the *Kaht* chewing for some time," the general broke in somewhat impatiently. "It has been a habit among the soldiers who occupied the garrison long before I came to take over the command. I saw no harm in it any more than chewing tobacco or smoking hashish or kief."

"The *Kaht* used in this Mabraz has been treated," continued Dewar in cold, calm tones, "with a subtle Indian drug, which has helped to intoxicate and attract the men. But that is not all. The Levantine and his assistants oiled themselves that the thing might not bite them."

"Oiled themselves?" muttered the general in an undertone, as though trying to fathom the meaning of the words.

"Yes," snapped Dewar as he turned toward the door he had ordered closed as the men had poured in. "And the singer drowned the sound," he muttered to himself by way of an afterthought.

Dewar opened the door halfway and motioned to the general to approach. They together peered into the room, which was now empty and in total darkness. The dancer and the singer had disappeared.

"Listen!" hissed Dewar.

In that breathless suspense of listening there came to them a sound faint and drowsy, like the low mumble of captive bees.

"They were in a little cage that had been let down through the ceiling," breathed Dewar, "but are now flying free in the room. I saw one light on a man, as I watched before," he added grimly, "and I recognized it, as I recognized the peculiar, hissing hum."

"What is it? What is it?" whispered the general tensely.

"It is the humming of African flies," replied Dewar laconically. "The fly whose bite gives the sleeping sickness in a new and virulent form!"

IT ISN'T BEING DONE

I HAVE here," began the aspiring young author, "a story telling of a young man disguising himself as a girl in order to capture and punish a masher."

"Too trite," said the editor brusquely.

"I also have another story here," went on the A. Y. A., "telling of a young woman and a young man employed at very moderate salaries in an office and falling in love with each other, after which it develops that the young man is immensely wealthy and merely working for experience."

"Too obvious," declared the editor.

"I also have here a story," persisted the A. Y. A., "telling of a cub reporter securing a great 'scoop' for his newspaper."

"Overdone," snapped the editor.

"And lastly I have here a story," said the A. Y. A. hesitatingly, "in which a young man in this country, of German parentage, happens to come across some important state secrets—and doesn't turn out to be a German spy."

"Great heavens!" And the editor jumped up and snatched the manuscript from the hands of the A. Y. A. "Let me have that at once. I haven't heard of anything so original since the war started."

VICTORY IN THE COBB FAMILY

IF you were Mrs. Ty Cobb, what would you do to cheer up your husband on the afternoon when the Tigers were defeated?

If he was particularly fond of mutton chops, would you get a whole raft of them and have the cook broil them to a turn?

If he was a keen admirer of the singing of John McCormack, would you start a record going the minute your husband came through the front door?

You would?

Why?

To assuage your husband's feelings? To make him forget?

Very well. But, being Mrs. Ty Cobb, you wouldn't repeat.

The Cobb family is a well-regulated household. Everything has its place, and everything is in its place. And Ty, when the Tigers are beaten, doesn't want big dinners or music—doesn't want anything to take his mind to happier things. Ty takes defeats to heart. They spoil his digestion and irritate his soul.

That's why Mrs. Cobb is always interested in the baseball scores. She telephones the baseball office every afternoon, and if the Tigers win——

The grocer and butcher know all about it.

The Lapses of Larry Loman

By Edgar Wallace

Author of "The Man Who Knew," Etc.

III.—THE CURE

THE firm name of Lewis Plink & Gothmeyar is not unknown in the city of London. There are parts of Brazil and the Argentine where it is a household word, and the palatial offices of the firm in Commissioner Street, Johannesburg, automatically testify to the consideration in which this great financial house is held.

Mr. Lewis Plink will best be remembered as the gentleman who presented Wesbury Cathedral with a service of gold plate far exceeding in value the ratable property of the city of Wesbury, and also as the owner of the steam yacht *Hermada,* which was faster than the fastest destroyer of the period and was furnished with a luxury beside which the furnishing of a millionaire's suite on an Atlantic liner was a Bloomsbury drawing-room.

Mr. Plink had many interests and his businesses many ramifications, which is natural, since it is not only impossible for a billionaire to keep all his eggs in one basket, but to confine his storage to baskets at all.

On the night of the thirtieth of June, a police constable of "C" division, who was making his round of Orange Street, Covent Garden, discovered a door leading to the business premises occupied by John Wallington, Limited, printers, had been forced, and that, in the language of the police, an entrance had been effected. Summoning a comrade, he proceeded to make investigations. The door gave onto a little yard, a ladder was against a small building used as an ink store, a skylight had been forced, and through this one of the diligent officers of the law lowered himself, while his friend kept watch outside.

Thanks to the intelligent employment of rubber soles by the officers of "C" division, the policeman was able to surprise a wholly unauthorized visitor in the act of rummaging the manager's desk, and after a short struggle he was secured and conveyed to Vine Street police station.

It happened that Larry Loman, of the criminal intelligence department, was in the station when the prisoner arrived, discussing with the inspector one of the minor crimes which had been obviously committed by that extraordinary corporation which was subsequently known to the newspapers as the Crime Trust.

The conversation was suspended while the prisoner was pushed into the steel dock and the usual interrogation took place.

"Name?"

A little hesitation, then: "Brown—Thomas Brown."

"Age?"

"Thirty-three."

"Occupation?"

"Laborer."

"Where do you live?"

Again hesitation; then defiantly: "The Fritz Hotel."

"None of your nonsense," said the station sergeant. "Where do you live?"

"Rowton House, Kings Cross."

One of the divisional C. I. D. men had strolled in, and the prisoner caught his eye.

"Hello, Terence!" said the detective.

"You've made an error," replied the prisoner haughtily.

"His name is Terence Brien," explained the detective; "he is an old lag. He had five years for burglary at the Chelmsford Assizes in 1904. What

have you been up to, Terence—the old game?"

"Never mind about the old game," growled the prisoner, and then, with an air of triumph: "You are not going to have it so easy this time, Mr. Busy; I shall have the best counsel that money can buy. I've got friends, I have."

Larry came forward, for now he was the most interested member of the audience.

"Would you like us to communicate with your friends?" he asked.

The man looked at him suspiciously.

"No, thank you, Mr. Loman," he grinned. "I know you, sir. You are not going to get any information out of me."

"You are working for the trust," said Larry. "Tell me why you went to Wallington's."

"Find out," said the man defiantly.

That Larry intended doing, and after the man had been removed to a cell he went back to the robbed office. The policeman had evidently disturbed the man before he had got very far with his work. Only a few packages of paper had been taken from the desk, and these were mainly invoices awaiting dispatch and correspondence of the previous day between the firm and its customers which had not yet been filed.

Pending the arrival of a representative of the firm, Larry took the liberty of examining the contents of the desk. One thing that had struck him from the first was the care with which the desk had been opened, and probably this had accounted for the length of time the man had taken, because he had obviously had the greater part of an hour. This fact was discovered by inquiries of a caretaker who lived opposite the works and who thought he had seen the flash of an electric lamp an hour before the burglary was discovered.

The drawer of the desk had not been forced, but it had been picked with great care. The documents taken from the drawer had not been scattered, but had been carefully placed on the top of the desk, and evidently the man had instructions to replace all that he had removed in as near as possible the same position and order as they had been when he found them. The very last package Larry removed from the desk was a registered envelope, the wax seal of which had been broken, probably by the official of the firm on the previous day. It contained a typewritten list of names and addresses running to many pages, and each sheet had been typed upon the letterheading of Lewis Plink & Gothmeyar. It was four o'clock before a representative of the burgled firm arrived.

"Yes," he said, "that list came yesterday from Mr. Plink. We do all his private printing, and we are sending out cards of invitation for his daughter's marriage."

"Do you send out the cards?"

The representative nodded.

"The lists come direct to us. We print a separate card for each guest; that is to say, we alter the name with every impression. This is a practice of Mr. Plink when he is giving a particularly important party."

The object of the burglary was very clear to Larry. It was to obtain that list of names, and it had been committed by the order of the trust. Why was the list required? He knew Lewis Plink by reputation as an immensely wealthy man, and he remembered reading in a newspaper that the wedding presents had been valued at a fabulous sum, the present from the father of the bride taking some unusual shape. What it was he could not remember except that it was something bizarre and uncommon.

A search through the file of his papers revealed both the object of the burglary and the larger objective of the trust. Mr. Plink was a man of original views, and if they lacked something in taste they made up for the deficiency in tangible value. The bride, who was dowered with her weight in gold, had evidently fired the great financier's imagination, and Miss Louisa Plink was to receive as a wedding present her weight in treasury notes.

Larry opened a safe in which he kept a supply of ready money, took his letter

scales, and weighed an ounce. He discovered that it took thirty-two treasury notes to turn the balance. If Miss Plink was an ordinarily healthy girl, she would weigh one hundred and twenty-six pounds—that was one thousand and eight ounces—so that her dowry would amount to something like one hundred and sixty thousand pounds or eight hundred thousand dollars, which, in negotiable money, was a prize well worth securing. He looked at his watch. It was nearly seven o'clock, and he realized that he had had no sleep that night. He snatched three hours' rest; then, after a bath and a change, he made his way to the city office of Plink & Gothmeyar. Mr. Plink was a jovial little man, very bald, and very human.

Larry, who had been ushered in almost immediately, was waved to a seat and pressed to a cigar almost in one motion.

"Yes, it is perfectly true," said Mr. Plink, with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat; "the money is at Cateby Court at this minute. It is being looked after with the other presents, and I do not think you need have any fear. I have two private detectives there day and night."

"Have you added to the list of your guests?" asked Larry.

Mr. Plink nodded.

"I sent along one new name this morning—Miss Cuthbert."

"A friend of yours?"

Mr. Plink hesitated.

"Well, not exactly a friend, but the friend of a friend," he said. "I am not at liberty to talk about her, but I can only tell you that the lady is of unimpeachable character, who has been known to my friend—whose name I am not for the moment permitted to give—for many years."

"That seems all right," said Larry after a pause. "And now I want you to add another to your list."

"You mean yourself?"

Larry nodded.

"With all the pleasure in life," said Mr. Plink, and pressed his bell. "The wedding is to-morrow afternoon at two o'clock, and the dinner is at seven. I shall expect you, Mr."—he looked at the card again—"Mr. Loman."

It was Larry's day for consulting his doctor, he remembered with a little grimace as he came into the street. He had grown to like Sir George Grayborn, and his gesture of repugnance was less dictated by an objection to the eminent nerve specialist than an indication of his resentment that he had to consult a doctor at all. He secretly hoped that Sir George would be out, but the great man, as it happened, was spending the afternoon at home, an unusual circumstance.

"I am glad you came in; I was getting bored," said Sir George, smiling pleasantly and rising to shake hands with his visitor. "Well, how is your amnesia?"

"I have not had an attack for over a week," said Larry cheerfully, and the elder man nodded.

"There will come a time when these curious lapses of yours will pass away forever," he said. "Yours is a very interesting case, about the third that I have met with in my professional career. I have, of course, had any number of patients who have lost their memory, but your peculiar disease is rather unusual." He was sitting at his table, fingering a pencil. "Your case is this—that at awkward hours of the day, without any warning save a faint buzzing sensation in your head, your memory fails. For three or four hours you are totally incapable of remembering anything which happened before the lapse began, though you are guided by a subconscious knowledge of previous happenings. At the end of your four hours you recover your memory, but now you cannot remember what happened during the period of lapse. That, I think, is your case."

Larry nodded.

"A very awkward and disagreeable complaint," smiled Sir George, "but we will pull you through." He reached out a hand and gripped the other's wrist, looking at his watch the while. "Pulse normal," he turned Larry's face to the window, "pupils react to

light. Hold out your hand." Larry obeyed. "No tremors. Close your eyes. No swaying."

He applied one or two other tests, all of which were apparently satisfactory.

"You have no organic disease at all. Beyond this strange loss of memory, which is inconvenient without being dangerous, you are in perfect health. Now, tell me, what are you going to do for the next two or three days?"

Larry explained the engagement he had just made. The old man lifted his eyebrows.

"So you are going to sit in the shadow of Midas, too," he said.

"Are you going?" asked Larry in surprise.

"I attend Mr. Plink in a professional capacity," said the other dryly, "but a man more innocent of nerve I have never met. These functions amuse me. I shall probably see you there. I am glad I am going," he added after a moment's thought. "I am rather keen on seeing you while this fit of lost memory is on you. I nearly saw you the other day, and I have been vexed that I missed the opportunity."

Larry saw him the next afternoon on the platform of Charing Cross, which was thronged with Mr. Plink's guests. The millionaire had hired a special train to carry his friends to Chislehurst, and Larry and the doctor traveled down together.

"By the way, who are those young gentlemen?" asked the doctor just before the train drew out, indicating two silk-hatted young men who were strolling along the platform in laughing conversation, swinging their canes carelessly. "I know most of the people here, but I cannot place these."

"And I am afraid I cannot enlighten you," said Larry. He might have substituted "won't" for "can't," but in all matters affecting the service he was a most reticent man, and the two immaculate youths who were strolling aimlessly from carriage to carriage in search of a seat were men of his own department.

The train was met at Chislehurst by a fleet of motor cars, and the guests were whisked off to Mr. Plink's magnificent home. Larry and the professor traveled together in the same car.

"He is not a bad little fellow," said Sir George. "I have known him for a number of years, and, in fact, I have been a sort of confidential adviser to the family. He is hopelessly rich, which is against him, and he has sufficient sense not to interfere with his really delightful château, which was built by the Duc de Lieven, who accompanied Napoleon III. into exile."

It was, indeed, a beautiful house, and if the interior was a little more ornate than the delicate lines of the architect had led the visitor to expect, that was pardonable.

Larry immediately sought an interview with Mr. Plink, and found him in his big study. To Larry's surprise, he discovered Sir George already on the spot ensconced in a deep armchair, smoking a reflective cigarette. He looked up with an amused smile as Larry entered.

"You know my friend, Sir George Grayborn," said Mr. Plink, indicating the other with a wave of his hand.

Larry nodded.

"I have no secrets from Sir George."

"Nor have I, unfortunately," smiled Larry.

"We have been friends for ten years," said Mr. Plink. "He attended my poor wife—help yourself to a cigar—you weren't so prosperous in those days, Sir George."

"Prosperity is a relative term," said the specialist. "I was perhaps happier then than I am now."

"Naturally, naturally," said the sympathetic Mr. Plink. "It is rather curious, now that I come to think of it," he went on reflectively; "the first time I met you we had the very same accident, which we are trying to avoid now."

He looked up with a broad grin at the young police officer.

"Do you mean a robbery?" said Larry quickly.

Mr. Plink nodded.

"I lost the finest pearl necklace that

has ever been seen in this country," he said with a certain amount of satisfaction—for it was a pleasure to Mr. Plink to be magnificent even in his losses. "It was taken from this study," he went on, "worth one hundred and fifty thousand pounds; disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. Do you remember, Sir George?"

Sir George nodded. "Now you mention the matter, I do remember."

"How did it occur?" asked Larry. "I don't remember hearing anything about it."

Mr. Plink shook his head.

"It was probably before your time, and it was a very simple matter. Somebody just opened the safe, took the pearls, relocked the safe—and there you are!"

"Is this the safe?" asked Larry curiously, and walked up to a massive steel structure in the corner of the room.

"You bet your life it isn't!" said Mr. Plink decisively. "I've had that safe changed. Do you remember, Sir George," he asked, "I changed it on your recommendation? There is not another like it in Europe."

He went to the door, rapidly twisted the combination, turned the handle, and the great steel door swung open.

Larry looked inside. There was nothing inside save a strong canvas sack, which was sewn at the top and bore a label in one corner.

"You can guess what this is," beamed Mr. Plink. "It is my present to my daughter. I am not showing it with the other wedding presents. I am taking no risks."

"Are you guarding the safe?"

"Night and day," replied Mr. Plink. "Didn't you see a man watching outside when you came in? Well, when we go out he will come back."

"An interesting safe," said Sir George.

He got up from his chair, walked to the big deposit, and twiddled the handle under the amused eyes of the millionaire.

"Nobody but myself knows the combination word," he smiled; "no other person in the world can open it."

They talked a little while before Larry made his adieux. He went back to the grounds, where the guests were promenading, and rejoined them. Here he was introduced to a very healthy and substantial Miss Plink, thoroughly enjoying all the attention she attracted and wholly self-possessed.

Larry did not attend the ceremony an hour later. He made a brief examination of the house and grounds. He found the detective on duty before the safe and two more in charge of the wedding presents, which had been displayed in the morning room, and saw nothing to arouse his suspicion.

It was an hilarious wedding breakfast. Everybody was in the best of spirits, only Larry, conscious that trouble of some kind was brewing, was anxious, alert, and observant.

"You are very thoughtful, Mr. Loman," chided his partner. "I believe you are nervous."

He smiled at the girl at his side a little ruefully.

"You are nearer the truth than you imagine, Lady Valentine," he said. "I am generally nervous when I cannot see everybody at the table. I wish Mr. Plink had been a little less magnificent in the way of table decorations."

He pointed to an elaborate silver center piece smothered with fruit and flowers, and Lady Valentine Curtenleigh beckoned a waiter.

"Oh, please don't!" protested Larry.

"Mr. Plink and I are old friends," she laughed. "You see, father and Mr. Plink are partners." She made a little grimace. "We dukes must live, you know, Mr. Loman—there!"

The center piece was with difficulty removed.

"Now I hope you will be less distrait," she went on. "If I had only known—— Why, what are you frowning at?"

Larry's frown was one of perplexity. Sitting opposite to him was a girl with a pale, clear skin and deep, thoughtful eyes.

"Who is that?" he whispered.

"That?" echoed his companion. "I was told her name, but I have forgot-

ten. Oh, I have it—Miss Cuthbert! She is a friend of Sir George Grayborn's."

Where had he seen her before? That they had met he knew, but where? Suddenly the girl caught his eyes, and her face went a little whiter. She stared for a second, then turned her head away abruptly. Who was she? Where had he seen her before? He puzzled his brain to supply an answer, and hardly noticed that Mr. Plink had begun his speech.

"Now I want to ask a few friends to accompany me, my daughter, and her husband to my holy of holies," said the jovial voice of Mr. Plink, "to present a little present which is perhaps—er—er—unique in the history of wedding presents."

There was a little gust of laughter, a rattling of knife handles, a dozen fresh young voices raised in laughing protest, demands from familiar friends that the presentation should be public and that "Leah's" weight should be made known, and then the little party made the best of their way from the room.

Mr. Plink, his new son-in-law, his daughter, Sir George Grayborn, and Larry were the five who assembled in the study.

The detective was an interested spectator on the fringe of the group.

Mr. Plink twisted the combination and swung open the safe.

"Good God!" he gasped, for the safe was empty.

The detective swore that he had not left the room and that no person had entered since Mr. Plink and his guest had gone out.

"It is impossible that the safe could have been tampered with," said the troubled Mr. Plink; "it is fitted on a solid concrete foundation, and, as you see, it is possible to get round it."

Larry had made a most careful examination of the exterior. There were no signs of jimmy or blowpipe, no indication at all that the safe had been forced. He examined the interior, and found nothing that gave the slightest clew. The detective in charge was a well-known sergeant of the C. I. D., who had been in the service for twenty years, whose word could be relied upon, and who was absolutely trustworthy.

"I can't understand it," said Larry.

He paced the garden, the professor at his side.

"What have you done?" asked Sir George.

"I have wired to London naturally, and the commissioner is coming down. Who is that lady?" he asked, suddenly catching sight of an isolated figure ahead.

"You mean Miss Cuthbert?" said Sir George. "She is an old friend of mine. I knew her father."

"Will you introduce me?" asked Larry.

Sir George hesitated, but only for a moment, and he walked toward the girl, spoke to her, and returned by her side.

"I have an idea I met you somewhere. By Jove! Wasn't it in the Botanical Gardens? You were selling roses."

She did not smile. Her eyes were fixed upon his.

"I remember, too," she said simply.

"Now that is very curious. I——" He suddenly put his hand to his head.

Sir George was eying him keenly.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"I'm afraid this infernal attack of mine is coming on," said Larry.

"Do you hear the noise in your head?"

Larry nodded.

The three stood without movement, save that once or twice Larry passed his hand wearily across his eyes.

"How are you?" asked Sir George after a while.

"I am all right, I think," said Larry cheerfully.

The physician took from his pocket a tortoise-shell penknife.

"Do you see this?"

"I see it very well," said Larry.

Sir George replaced the knife in his pocket.

"What did I show you just now?"

A look of bewilderment came into Larry's face.

"You didn't show me anything."

"Didn't I show you a penknife?"

"You didn't show me anything," said Larry in surprise.

The physician took his arm and signaled to the girl, and they walked toward a small plantation which stood in one corner of the ground.

"Sit down," said Sir George, and Larry obeyed. "I am going to tell you something which will interest you," he said slowly. "It gives me a remarkable sense of satisfaction to tell you this, because I know that everything I say will be forgotten three seconds after I have spoken. You may, in your present condition, be capable of continuous action, but you are wholly incapable of recalling words or impressions."

He waited a few minutes.

"What did I just tell you?" he asked.

"I'm blessed if I know," replied Larry. "Did you speak to me?"

The professor nodded to the girl, who was watching the detective with anxiety and fear.

"You are looking for the head of a great criminal organization," said Sir George. "It will interest you to know that I am that head." Again he paused. "Do you remember what I said?"

Larry shook his head.

"I heard you say nothing," he replied.

"Good!" smiled Sir George. "It will also interest you to learn that, although I am an excellent physician, the world refused to recognize my qualities until I had stolen sufficient money to establish myself as a great specialist; now it also recognizes me as a great organizer of crime. How do you imagine for the first three years of my struggle, laden down with debt, without friends, I managed to keep up my Harley Street house?"

"Oh, father, be careful!" cried the girl in terror.

Sir George smiled again.

"He remembers nothing, my dear, and he will remember less," he added significantly, and his thin lips were hard.

"Father, you told me you would not——"

"My life depends upon ridding myself of this man," said Sir George. "Do you know what it means to me if I am detected?"

"Do nothing desperate," she pleaded.

"Perhaps you are right," he said softly. "We shall have our reward, dear; I have already booked our passage for Buenos Aires. I have done with the organization after this."

He turned again to Larry, who still sat cross-legged on the grass.

"You wonder how this last thing was done. I will tell you, and it will be amusing to watch you struggling after clews in three or four hours' time when you recover your power of sequent thought. The safe, as our friend Plink tells you, was supplied at my suggestion about a year after I began my criminal career. It was made by an American criminal who died in this country and whom I attended. It was placed in Plink's house by my own workmen, and for nine years I have been watching for a chance of a coup. Plink thinks that it has a solid steel and concrete foundation, but you would discover that the steel foundation, at any rate, is literally a hollow sham. If you turn the combination handle six times to the left, the floor of the safe turns, and all that is on the floor is precipitated to a little chamber immediately beneath. The bag of notes is still in the safe. One month every year I spend a vacation at this place while Plink is abroad. There will be no difficulty in recovering those notes. And now," said the professor, looking at his watch, "I must take you back."

Larry rose from the grass, dusted himself carefully, and obediently followed the professor from the wood.

At five-thirty that evening the commissioner arrived and interviewed Larry. He found that young officer, his head in his hands, in Mr. Plink's study, and with him was Sir George Grayborn.

"I am afraid our young friend has had one of those wretched lapses," said Sir George to the commissioner.

"When did this happen?" asked the latter. "After or before the robbery?"

"After," said Sir George. "In fact,

I was with him when it occurred and have practically been with him ever since."

"Are you feeling better now, Larry?" asked the commissioner kindly.

"Oh, I'm feeling very fit," said Larry. "Will you excuse me?"

With a little nod, he walked out of the room.

The commissioner shook his head as he looked after him.

"Will he never be cured?"

"Oh, yes," replied the professor. "One of these days he will have the buzzing in his head and no more."

"You mean that it will not be followed by this extraordinary lapse of memory?"

"Just so," said Sir George, and then, as if a thought struck him, he walked to the door, threw it open, and called: "Loman!"

Larry was at the other end of the passage, and turned at the sound of his name.

"Tell my daughter I want her, will you?"

"Your daughter?" said Mr. Plink in surprise.

"Right!" cried the voice of Larry.

"Your daughter?" said Mr. Plink again.

"Yes," said Sir George quietly.

He paced the room, his head on his breast, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets, but offered no further explanation.

There was a tap at the door, and "Miss Cuthbert" came in.

"Do you want me, Sir George?" she asked.

"Just one moment, dear."

He drew her into a window recess.

"Take this," he said in a low voice. He handed her a bulky pocketbook. "You will find a car waiting at the end of the drive; I had it here in case of trouble. Tell Jackson to go straight to Dover. You will be in time to catch the Continental boat. If you don't hear from me, make your way to Switzerland; your passport is inside. Stay at the villa until I come. Whether it is for weeks or years, you must wait."

"Father!" she faltered.

"Do as I tell you. There is enough money there to last you for a year, but you have authority to draw on my account in the Bank of Geneva for all the money you require." He stooped and kissed her lightly on the forehead. "Go!" he ordered.

She hesitated a moment, and walked quickly from the room. She was descending the broad steps which led from the terrace to the grounds when she passed Larry. He favored her with a little nod and a queer, half-pitying smile.

"I shall want to see you in about half an hour, Miss Cuthbert," he said, "if you would be so kind as to come to the study."

She made no reply, and Larry walked thoughtfully into the house.

Sir George was expecting him, and had braced himself for the interview.

"You know why I have come, Sir George," said Larry quietly.

"I think I can guess," said the other.

"I am going to take you into custody on a charge of felony."

The commissioner stared from one to the other.

"What does it mean?"

"It means," said Sir George, "that I have made one great mistake and that your assistant is a very excellent actor. I think I am right in saying that for once the 'buzz' came, but you did not lose your memory."

"How did you know?" asked Larry quickly.

"You remembered that Miss Cuthbert was my daughter," said the head of the Criminal Trust and put out his wrists for the handcuffs.

"It was a clever move," said the commissioner. "Although it was fairly easy for a man who maintained a system of espionage to discover you had this wretched disease—from what I gather you are now cured—and to get into touch with you. By the way, have you traced the girl?"

Larry shook his head.

"I am not after the girl," he said shortly. "I have jailed the rest of the gang, and that is enough for me."

A Chat With You

WE try to cover the whole globe, more or less, in the fiction we publish in THE POPULAR, but we don't always succeed. Looking back, we cannot remember ever publishing a long story, or, in fact, very many short stories, of India. And yet here is the site of one of the oldest and most wonderful of world civilizations, the richest, strangest, and wildest of all countries. We in the U. S. A., with about a hundred million population, are inclined to think that we are a very considerable part of the earth and the fullness thereof. And yet India has over three hundred and fifteen million population, mostly of various shades of brown, and ruled by a small garrison of English. Here is a country at once highly cultivated and infested with wild animals, a country of all varieties of climate, from the moist heat of the tropics to the bitter cold of the Tibetan slopes, a country where intrigue and plot are part of the life of the people, and whose history reads like the wildest romance.

THE THREE SAPPHIRES," by W. A. Fraser, which starts in the next issue of the magazine, is one of the best stories of the East we have ever read. You will remember Mr. Fraser, perhaps, for his "Sa-Zada" stories, and for his recent serial in THE POPULAR. His long service in India, his knowledge of the country and people, his skill as a word painter and story-teller, all help to make this serial something especially colorful and vivid. It is a mystery story of India of to-day, of the tiger hunt and jungle and of the court of the Hindu prince. We regard it as one of the best things we have had to offer you in some time.

IN the next issue, also, Norroy once more appears in THE POPULAR. The dean of the secret diplomatic corps, the most astute and skillful of government agents, is remembered by every one who has read this magazine for any length of time. The search for the jade plates on which the lost secret of Chinese opium was written, was the last of his exploits chronicled in these pages. The new series of stories deals with events immediately preceding the entry of the United States into the present world war. There will be five of the stories. The first is entitled "The Book of the Betrayers." If you are not already acquainted with Yorke Norroy, you have a chance to meet him two weeks from to-day. The author who will introduce you to him is George Bronson-Howard.

WE hope you like aëroplane stories. We do, and we want to call your attention to one in the next issue. It is called "The Kid Pilot," and was written by Arthur Tuckerman. It is a short story, but it is almost all solid thrill, and worth remembering. Speaking of stories with thrills, we also want you to look out for a story of Mexican adventure in the next issue of the magazine, "The Rim of the Bowl," by Walter Adolphe Roberts. "Old Fish," by Raymond Brown, is a story of camp life. If you know comparatively little about plumbers, but have always admired them from a distance, as we do, you will be interested in the story, "One Reducer," by E. E. Harriman. It will show you that an industrious plumber can dig up as much excitement in the course of his business as if he were an elephant hunter.

THE complete novel which opens the next issue of the magazine is by W. B. M. Ferguson, and is called "The Ghost Hunter." It is a mystery story of American life, and has plenty of action, the sort of a stirring, pleasantly flowing tale that you have come to associate with Ferguson's name. In itself it is worth more than the price of the magazine. Also in the next number there is a Western story by Miles Overholt, a baseball story by Hugh Fullerton, and a story of the sunny South Seas by Ralph Stock, in addition to another big installment of O'Brien's great serial of American business, "The Green Scarf."

LYING before us now are four letters picked out of this morning's mail. Two of our correspondents want to know when we are going to give them another story by B. M. Bower. The other two ask for another tale of the submarines by Roy Norton. Happily we have both these stories on hand. The Bower story is one that we have been looking forward to talking to you about. We will be able to start it, we think, in the June 20th issue. It is called "The Sky Rider," and is the story of a cow-puncher whose ambition is to become an aviator and go to France to help the Allies win the war. It is a story hard to describe in its youthful breeziness, its humor, its charm, and stirring quality. It is a really big thing, one of the finest tales that B. M. Bower has ever written.

WE have in the same safe another novel by Roy Norton, detailing further adventures of "The Phantom U-boat" and its crew, fully as interesting as any they have seen in the past. In fact, we think it the best of all Norton's submarine tales. You will get it in an early issue of the magazine. We will tell you more about it two weeks from to-day. In the meantime, there is Norroy and a lot of other good things.

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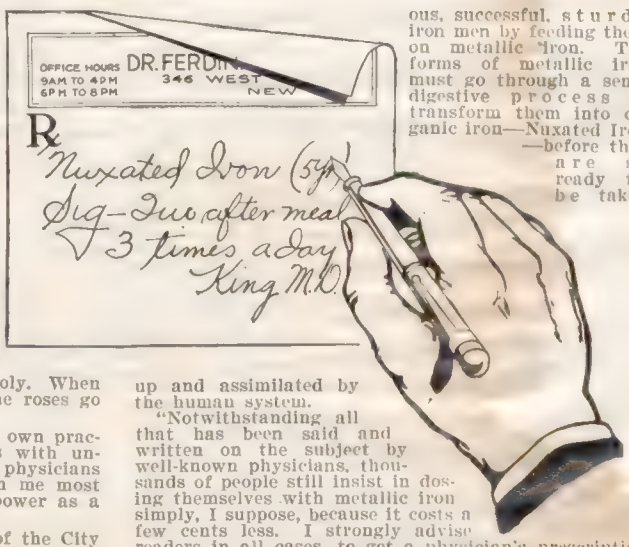
IT is conservatively estimated that over three million people annually in this country alone are taking Nuxated Iron. Such astonishing results have been reported from its use both by doctors and laymen, that a number of physicians in various parts of the country have been asked to explain why they prescribe it so extensively, and why it apparently produces so much better results than were obtained from the old forms of inorganic iron.

Extracts from some of the letters are given below:

Dr. Ferdinand King, a New York physician and Medical Author, says: "There can be no sturdy iron men without iron. Pallor means anæmia. Anæmia means iron deficiency. The skin of anæmic men and women is pale—the flesh flabby. The muscles lack tone, the brain fags and the memory fails and they often become weak, nervous, irritable, despondent and melancholy. When the iron goes from the blood of women, the roses go from their cheeks.



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Dr. A. J. Newman, late Police Surgeon of the City of Chicago and Former House Surgeon, Jefferson Park Hospital, Chicago, in commenting on the value of Nuxated Iron said: "This remedy has proven through my own tests of it to excel any remedy I have ever used for creating red blood, building up the nerves, strengthening the muscles and correcting digestive disorders. The manufacturers are to be congratulated in having given to the public a long felt want, a true tonic, supplying iron in an easily digested and assimilated form. A true health builder in every sense of the word."

Dr. James Francis Sullivan, formerly physician of Bellevue Hospital (Outdoor Dept.), New York, and the Westchester County Hospital said: "I have strongly emphasized the great necessity of physicians making blood examinations of their weak, anæmic, run-down patients. Thousands of persons go on year after year suffering from physical weakness and a highly nervous condition due to lack of sufficient iron in their red blood corpuscles, without ever realizing the real and true cause of their trouble. Without iron in your blood your food merely passes through the body, somewhat like corn through an old mill with rollers so wide apart that the mill can't grind.

"But in my opinion you can't make strong, vigorous, successful, sturdy iron men by feeding them on metallic iron. The forms of metallic iron must go through a semi-digestive process to transform them into organic iron—Nuxated Iron—before they are so ready to be taken up and assimilated by the human system.

"Notwithstanding all that has been said and written on the subject by well-known physicians, thousands of people still insist in dosing themselves with metallic iron simply, I suppose, because it costs a few cents less. I strongly advise readers in all cases, to get a physician's prescription for organic iron—Nuxated Iron—or if you don't want to go to this trouble then purchase only Nuxated Iron in its original packages and see that this particular name (Nuxated Iron) appears on the package. If you have taken preparations such as Nux and Iron and other similar iron products and failed to get results, remember that such products are an entirely different thing from Nuxated Iron."

If you are not strong or well, you owe it to yourself to make the following test: See how long you can work or how far you can walk without becoming tired. Next take two five-grain tablets of ordinary Nuxated Iron three times per day for two weeks, then test your strength again, and see how much you have gained.

MANUFACTURERS' NOTE: Nuxated Iron, which is prescribed and recommended by physicians, is not a secret remedy, but one which is well known to druggists. Unlike the older inorganic iron products, it is easily assimilated, does not injure the teeth, make them black, nor upset the stomach. The manufacturers guarantee successful and entirely satisfactory results to every purchaser or they will refund your money. It is dispensed in this city by all good druggists.

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- ☐ ADVERTISING
- ☐ Window Trimmer
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- ☐ Sign Painter
- ☐ Railroad Trainman
- ☐ ILLUSTRATING
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ BOOKKEEPER
- ☐ Stenographer and Typist
- ☐ Cert. Public Accountant
- ☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
- ☐ Railway Accountant
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ GOOD ENGLISH
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ CIVIL SERVICE
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ AUTOMOBILE OPERATING
- ☐ Auto Repairing
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- ☐ Spanish
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- ☐ Italian

Name _____

Present Occupation _____

Street and No. _____

City _____ State _____

27 YEARS THE ENEMY OF PAIN

AK HEADACHE TABLETS

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FOR HEADACHES, NEURALGIAS, LAGRIPPE, COLDS,
WOMEN'S ACHES AND ILLS

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25 CENTS

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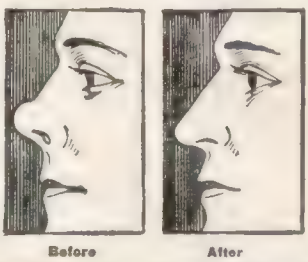
Cuticura For Baby's Itchy Skin

All druggists: Soap 25, Ointment 25 and 50, Talcum 25. Sample each free of "Cuticura, Dept. B, Boston."

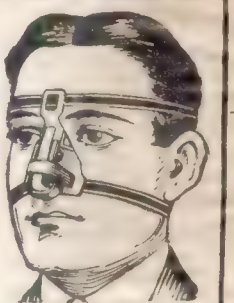
YOU HAVE A BEAUTIFUL FACE

BUT YOUR NOSE?

IN THIS DAY AND AGE attention to your appearance is an absolute necessity if you expect to make the most out of life. Not only should you wish to appear as attractive as possible for your own self-satisfaction, which is alone well worth your efforts, but you will find the world in general judging you greatly, if not wholly, by your "*looks*," therefore it pays to "look your best" at all times. **Permit no one to see you looking otherwise;** it will injure your welfare! Upon the impression you constantly make rests the failure or success of your life. Which is to be your ultimate destiny? My new *Nose-Shaper* "TRADOS" (Model 24) corrects now ill-shaped noses without operation, quickly, safely and permanently. Is pleasant and does not interfere with one's occupation, being worn at night



Before After



Write today for free booklet, which tells you how to correct ill-shaped noses without cost if not satisfactory

M. TRILETY, Face Specialist, 1017 Ackerman Bldg., Binghamton, N. Y.

Swear Off Tobacco

Tobacco Tells on Nervous System
Tobacco Ruins Digestion
Tobacco Stunts Boy's Growth
Tobacco Robs Man of Virility
Tobacco Steals from You the Pleasures, Comforts, Luxuries of Life

Tobacco Habit Banished In 48 to 72 Hours

Immediate Results

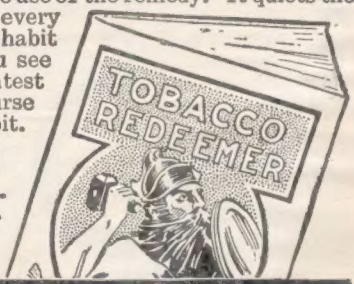
Trying to quit the tobacco habit unaided is a losing fight against heavy odds, and means a serious shock to your nervous system. So don't try it! Make the tobacco habit quit you. It will quit you if you will just take **Tobacco Redeemer** according to directions.

It doesn't make a particle of difference whether you've been a user of tobacco for a single month or 50 years, or how much you use, or in what form you use it. Whether you smoke cigars, cigarettes, pipe, chew plug or fine cut or use snuff—**Tobacco Redeemer** will positively remove all craving for tobacco in any form in from 48 to 72 hours. Your tobacco craving will begin to decrease after the very first dose—there's no long waiting for results.

Tobacco Redeemer contains no habit-forming drugs of any kind and is the most marvelously quick, absolutely scientific and thoroughly reliable remedy for the tobacco habit.

Not a Substitute

Tobacco Redeemer is in no sense a substitute for tobacco, but is a radical, efficient treatment. After finishing the treatment you have absolutely no desire to use tobacco again or to continue the use of the remedy. It quiets the nerves, and will make you feel better in every way. If you really want to quit the tobacco habit—get rid of it so completely that when you see others using it, it will not awaken the slightest desire in you—you should at once begin a course of **Tobacco Redeemer** treatment for the habit.



Results Absolutely Guaranteed

A single trial will convince the most skeptical. Our legal, binding, money-back guarantee goes with each full treatment. If **Tobacco Redeemer** fails to banish the tobacco habit when taken according to the plain and easy directions, your money will be cheerfully refunded upon demand.

Let Us Send You Convincing Proof

If you're a slave of the tobacco habit and want to find a sure, quick way of quitting "for keeps" you owe it to yourself and to your family to mail the coupon below or send your name and address on a postal and receive our free booklet on the deadly effect of tobacco on the human system, and positive proof that **Tobacco Redeemer** will quickly free you from the habit.

Newell Pharmacal Company
Dept. 570, St. Louis, Mo.

Free Book Coupon

NEWELL PHARMACAL CO.,
Dept. 570, St. Louis, Mo.

Please send, without obligating me in any way, your free booklet regarding the tobacco habit and proof that **Tobacco Redeemer** will positively free me from the tobacco habit.

Name.....

Street and No.....

Town..... State.....

I Earned $2200 IN FOUR MONTHS

This Is Richard A. Oldham

Mr. Oldham was telegraph operator for the Illinois Central Railroad for twenty years. He is fifty-eight years old. During all those twenty years, he drew the customary monthly salary of a telegraph operator—no more—no less. One day he read one of my advertisements and the possibilities of making money in the Auto Tire Repair Business. In a few weeks, he had purchased and installed a Haywood outfit, and was doing business for himself. He was **His Own Boss.** A short time ago he wrote us that his income in four months was as much as it had been in Two and One-Half years as Telegraph Operator. You men who have been left at home—who are beyond the draft age, can and must take up the burdens left behind by others. Oldham is a living example of what can be done. There are **thirty million** tires in use every day—punctures and blow outs are common. Something going wrong all the time. New tires advancing to prohibitive prices. Owners forced to have their old tires fixed. I have 500 places to be filled now. 500 stations where tire repairing is neglected, because there is no one to do it.

I Must Have 500 Men

to fill these places within the next 60 days

I have a big interesting book to send you—a book about tires—it tells all about them—how they are repaired by the Haywood method—explains this business—gives inside figures and profit. Gives actual proof of success—letters of others who are now operating Haywood Shops and making big money. What these men have done you can do. $2500 to $4000 a year is conservative. One machine will give you a start. You can see business around you—everywhere there are automobiles there are tires that need repairing. You know that. All you do is open a shop—put out a Haywood sign, and auto owners will come to you, welcome you and the service you bring them. If you haven't seen the "Sign of the Man and Machine" there is a big opportunity awaiting you.

Sign the coupon and mail it today, or send a post card or letter.

M. HAYWOOD, *Pres.*

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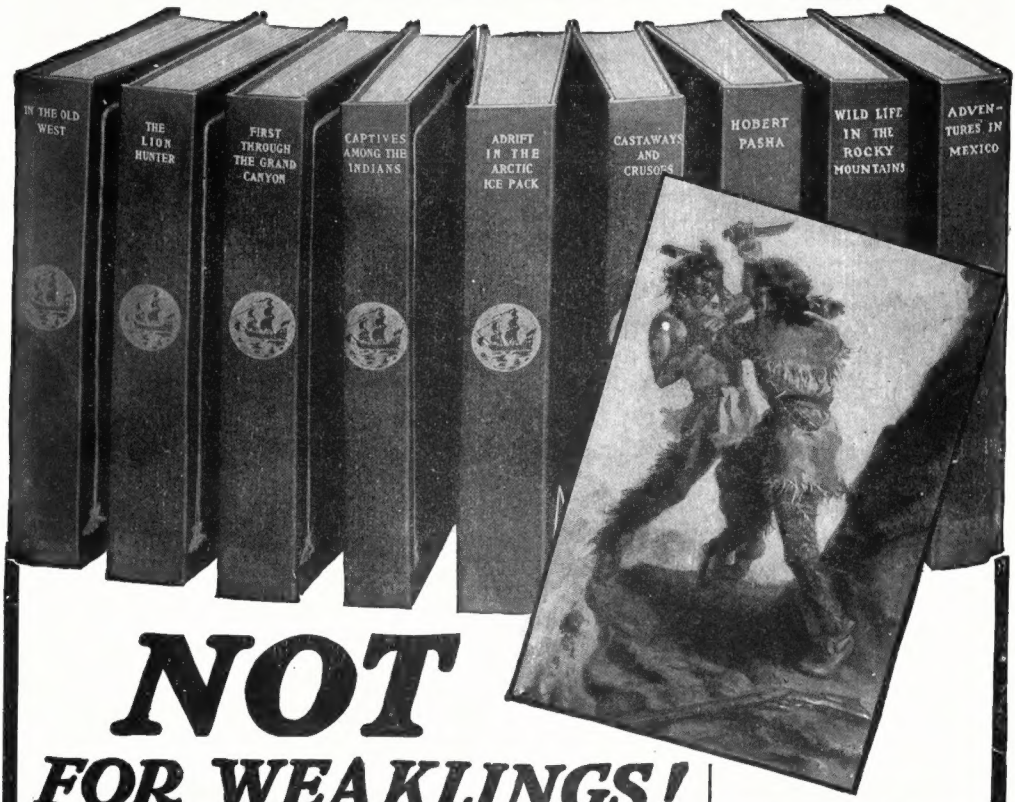
IN THE OLD WEST
THE LION HUNTER
FIRST THROUGH THE GRAND CANYON
CAPTIVES AMONG THE INDIANS
ADRIFT IN THE ARCTIC ICE PACK
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These are the actual experiences of the adventurers who climbed the mountains, penetrated the wilderness, explored the seas and crossed the deserts. No such records of hardship, endurance and achievement have ever before been gathered together. Death dogged each step of the men who wrote them. They are meat for strong men—not for babes or weaklings.

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The stick is the most economical form of shaving soap. As we make a shaving powder and cream also, we are in a position to give you this disinterested and helpful information. Colgate's "Handy Grip" is the Thrifty Shaving Stick.

Lather with Colgate's, shave with Comfort.

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